

LET'S TALK SEX:
PEDAGOGY OF A NEW SEXUAL MORALITY FOR PREMARITAL SEX
CHURCHED AND UNCHURCHED SINGLE ADULTS

By

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Abstract

LET'S TALK SEX: PEDAGOGY OF HUMAN SEXUALITY AND SEX FOR CHURCHED AND UNCHURCHED SINGLE ADULTS

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For young Christian adults living in a sex-saturated culture and society today, where sex is often misunderstood and misinterpreted, education in human sexuality has become critical, and one of the most important educational issues of the 21st Century. As such, the sexual development of young adults is one of the most important areas of their journey to adulthood, which can strongly be influenced by a popular culture that exploits and distorts God's good gift of sex. For this reason, this demonstration project sought to gain a deeper understanding of Christian college single adults, ages 18-29 years of age—their attitudes, beliefs, and perceptions of sex and human sexuality in the context of premarital sex. Because premarital sex can be viewed as a biblical and moral theological issue, and because of the lack of sex education in homes/fairh communities, this project will develop a community outreach hermeneutical space for "Sex Talk Table Forum" dialogues, and create a new theological approach to sexual morality about premarital sex, for those who seek biblical/theological understanding, guidance and affirmation regarding their God-given gift of sex.

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INTRODUCTION THE AUTHOR'S EXPERIENCE AND JOURNEY

In retrospect, it was during the 1960s and 1970s, that the secret was let out that sex could be an end in and of itself without reproductive considerations. By the 1980s my Generation X was bombarded with sex on television, movies, and internet, which was not even possible for me to watch, growing up in the beautiful island of Jamaica, West Indies, where I was born. I was raised in a Christian single family household by my beloved grandmother, with three older brothers and younger sister. My mother was a young, single adult, who was not able to raise her five children; and as a result, we were all raised by our grandparents. My family's socio-economic status was borderline average; in other words, my beloved grandmother was single, uneducated and unemployed, but it was her strong faith and trust in God, coupled with the help of my beloved mother, which allowed her to keep a roof over our heads. Growing up in Kingston, Jamaica, life was very challenging due to the oppressive political, socio-economic, and cultural government systems that kept the people and country in a state of bondage and instability. In spite of these socially and culturally oppressive challenges, it was my beloved grandmother's strong faith in God, and profound religious/spiritual beliefs, which enabled her to instill moral values and Christian beliefs in our household.

In addition, by means of grace, I was privileged to attend a Catholic School, even though my family's Christian beliefs were rooted in the Baptist traditions. During my adolescent years, there were no effort, support, guidelines and teaching on the topic of

sex within my household or the church. In those days, grandmothers and parents did not provide guidance on sex, but they would say in Jamaican Patois (Patwah) “*wat sweet yuh, will soon sour yuh,*” meaning if you are having sex now, you will pay a price later. As I recalled, the only awareness or education I received as a young teen concerning sex, was channeled through the media, movies and pop music, which was the core of the Jamaican pop culture, no different from the society and culture we live in today. As a result I have seen many young, teen girls including my friends from school became prematurely engaged in premarital sex; and I am of course no exception, because my adolescent years were full of bad judgment. Considering all these factors, and the lack of sex education and guidance, I became a young, teen, single mother, and realized what my grandmother had tried to tell me about sex.

From this perspective, as a late 40s, Unapologetic, Christian, Single Mother and a Single Adults Ministry Leader who is currently engaged, I’ve often contemplated deeply on my adolescent life experiences and wondered if I would have made the decision to have premarital sex if my parents had provided me with “sex talk” and biblical guidance. After all, today when I think of my beloved son Jason who is 32 years of age and is married to his beautiful wife, Ferris, and their many accomplishments as older Millennials, I am profoundly proud and grateful for what God has done and what He continues to do in our lives. In all honesty, maybe having the “sex talk” would have delayed my early teenage pregnancy, but would not have changed the feelings of being young and in love, coupled with peer pressure and the natural desire to have sex. The truth of the matter is, for me it was not just the physical aspect of sex, because even today I cannot describe the erotic passions I have grown to understand and experience in my

adulthood. I clearly remember how my cultural sensibility played a huge role, along with my desire to love and be loved by the boy I was in love with. At the core, I have a profound love and empathy for my beloved grandmother and mother, realizing how difficult it must have been for them to engage in conversations with me about God's gift and purpose for sex, but also regret not knowing what a loving and healthy relationship/marriage between a woman and a man entails. For reasons unknown, my beloved grandmother was never married nor had a relationship with a man after she gave birth to her children. My beloved mother was also not married at the of my adolescence to young adulthood.

With all due respect, let me make it unequivocally clear, that this Doctor of Ministry thesis is not only an academic achievement for me. Because of my social location and past experiences, coupled with my commitment and passion for single young adults, I also considered myself a part of the problem, and was relentlessly determined to continue this journey in search of a prophetic, deeper understanding that leads to freedom, affirmation and acceptance, in embracing God's good gift of sex. It is vitally important to note that after an analysis of my previous demonstration proposal project and discussions with my site team, I was able to critically reflect on the many assumptions and presuppositions I had made in my initial proposal. First and foremost, in all honesty, as a Single Adults Ministry leader, I had over the years become comfortable and accustomed to ministering to a more mature population of single adults. I assumed my target audience would be a more mature single adult population. I must admit that because of my inexperience, lack of knowledge and unfamiliarity with college-age, young adults, I doubted my ability, thinking that I was not as socially, technologically

and culturally knowledgeable as many of the emerging young adults regarding attitudes, behaviors, sexual scripts and sexual practices.

This reflective consciousness, coupled with research, literature reviews, and interactions with Christian, young adults, enabled me to theologically understand my own fear, ignorance, brokenness, biases, embedded beliefs, inabilities, as well as the values, integrity, dignity, humility, visions and hope, I could contribute to support the authenticity and integrity of this demonstration project. With this theological understanding I became very aware that my biases and ethical and moral viewpoints would be tested, where power relations may be decidedly unequal, and working in an emotionally, psychologically, energetic and challenging focus group/discussion environment might evoke my own brokenness and inner inabilities. Well, with all humbleness and thankfulness to God, I must say that this research experience was challenging, overwhelming, but most importantly, it was a transformative experience that enabled me to grow as a servant-hood leader. Not only did the experience strengthen my leadership competencies, but I grew spiritually by listening to the voice of God that led me to a deeper and richer understanding of his *agape* love for me and all God's children.

Therefore, at this juncture of my adult life, ministerial leadership experiences, theological education and achievements, my faith in God and theological reasoning led a humble servant and a sinner saved by grace to the understanding that the mysteries of sex are intertwined and interconnected with God's *agape* love. In other words, sin in the physical act of sex is the non-existence or removal of God's *agape* love. So when there is mutual love, dignity, respect, honesty, forgiveness, grace and trust in a relationship, then sex bonds and seals all the goodness, which is predicated upon how much humans strive

to love our spouses/partners as equally as we claim to love God our Creator. This is how I understand the phrase “and the two shall become one flesh” (Matt. 10:8) or “and they shall be one flesh” (Gen. 2:24). More importantly we are striving to become or to be one flesh, which is God’s will for his creatures. But because of sin, our human brokenness and embedded human natures, we sometimes fail to achieve our Creator’s will, but God sees our hearts and understands our human needs, to be in relationship with the other. Upon reflection, we could not have known God’s will for us, if we were not taught or properly guided which is key. More profoundly, this is challenging and requires prayer and surrendering one’s self to God, allowing Him to perfect us and our spouses/partners. After all it was God who said, “It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper as his partner” (Gen. 2:18). In the process, God will craft humanity to become suitable partners to embrace and enjoy our Creator’s good gift of sex, and there will no more silence, shame, guilt, judgments, ridicule and stigma associated with God’s good gift of sex.

CHAPTER 1 THE SETTING

More than ever, American popular culture is saturated with sexual imagery, and many commentators, researchers and religious institutions have interpreted this phenomenon as a representation of changing habits and values across the population. As such, many Americans' attitudes have changed on issues such as premarital sex, same-sex relationships, casual sex and marriage in our society. These attitudes towards sex and human sexuality may somehow seem outrageous to those from older generations, for in the 1950s one's sexual behavior was a taboo subject not open for discussions, and sexual intercourse was conducted behind closed doors in the context of marriage for reproductive and sexual pleasure. As a result, it was the 1960s sexual revolution or "free love" that profoundly challenged and changed many Americans traditional views, as they relate to sex and sexuality.¹

Today we are living in an unprecedented time in history. We have experienced new ideas of sexuality from unlikely sources: the U.S. Supreme Court's new marriage legislation for gay and lesbian couples; former sports celebrity Bruce Jenner's public announcement and affirmation of his transgender transformation as Caitlyn Jenner; and a more ambiguous and diverse family structure with different moral values. In spite of these new and exciting ideas, not much attention is given to Christian, young adults today who desire to express their God-given gift of sex, in a loving, faithful, committed, and

¹ Michael J. Heale, *The Sixties in America; History, Politics and Protest* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2001), 13–14.

respectful relationship. Instead they are judged and condemned as they search for a safe place to seek guidance and affirmation regarding their God-given gift of sex.

As parents, religious/faith leaders and educators we need to come to the realization that (1) abstinence campaigns do not resonate with adolescents and young adults today,² (2) the church's teachings on "no sex" before marriage has been challenged and rejected over the past 50 years, and (3) from a moral standpoint it is very tough for Christian, young adults and unmarried people to defend the unjust injunctions against premarital sex that Christianity has imposed since antiquity. The paradox of this phenomenon is that the media's view of God's good gift of sex has become the dominant source of negative sex education for our Christian adolescents and young adults in our homes and faith communities. A majority of religious/faith communities have failed as religious leaders and educators to provide moral guidance on sexual matters, and have remained silent and unseen regarding the culture we live in today. Now is the time for parents, religious/faith leaders and educators, along with young adults to engage in a prophetic dialogue that wrestles and grapples to seek a new sexual understanding and moral approach toward premarital sex because morality has to be a key ingredient for Christian, young adults in making informed premarital sexual decisions.

We all need to face the fact that almost all Americans have had sex before marriage, and premarital sex is not a new 21st century phenomena, but it has been and will continue to be normal sexual behavior for a vast majority of Americans.³ Therefore,

² Sue Alford, "Abstinence-Only-Until-Marriage Programs: Ineffective, Unethical, and Poor Public Health," *Advocates for Youth* (2007), <http://www.advocatesforyouth.org/publications/597?task=view> (accessed January 20, 2016).

³ Jennifer Warren, "Premarital Sex the Norm in America," *WebMD*, December 20, 2006, <http://www.webmd.com/sex-relationships/news/20061220/premarital-sex-the-norm-in-america> (accessed January 15, 2016).

throughout the study, the author will develop a biblical, hermeneutical and theological reflection in light of these moral challenges. Further, as an Unapologetic, Christian, Single mother and Single Adults Ministry Leader for the past 10 years, coupled with my profound passion and commitment for the single adult population, I firmly believe there is even a greater need today to develop a broader knowledge and cultural intelligence to understand the complexities of sex and human sexuality from a moral standpoint.

From a ministry leadership perspective, it is vitally important to understand the tasks and challenges in becoming a relevant, efficient and effective servant and transformative leader. For these reasons this demonstration project investigated, critically analyzed and assessed key influential factors with a particular focus on premarital sex, that have impacted, influenced, and shaped the attitudes and beliefs among nine Christian college-age young adults, ages 18-29, who identify themselves as heterosexual, and bisexual. The disposition and biological factors of the Christian, young adults' sexual orientation in the study will not be discussed, as this was not the primary objective of the research project. Instead, this research project was motivated by the following foundational research questions:

- a) What shaped and influenced your understanding of sex and human sexuality; and how does this understanding influence your sexual decisions?
- b) Why is it so difficult to openly talk about sex with your parents and in the church, and how do they make the conversations about sex difficult?
- c) How can further dialogue and education about sex and human sexuality help Christian, young adults to understand God's good gift of sex and to make informed healthy sexual decisions?

- d) What can parents, pastors/religious leaders do to develop a deeper understanding and embrace young adults who are sexually active?

Arguably, from a biblical, hermeneutical and theological viewpoint, the author has ambitiously, yet humbly, attempted to develop a new approach toward premarital sex for Christian, young adults and unmarried people. In developing a new sexual morality the author drew upon what Lewis B. Smedes describes as “creative compassion” in his book *Sex for Christians*, alluding to the fact that some premarital sex actions do have moral qualities that the author agrees with and will develop a theoretical argument to support this theological reasoning.⁴ As a theological framework and conscious awareness, the project created a hermeneutical space for “Sex Talk Table Forum” dialogue using radical education theories such as Paulo Freire’s invaluable insights on dialogue;⁵ and Thomas H. Groome’s “Shared Christian Praxis,”⁶ to initiate interactive dialogical discussions on moral, sexual issues within a safe place that allow for honest, open conversations that enable young adults to find biblical/theological understanding, guidance and affirmation, regarding their God given gift of sex and human sexuality, and moral development in making informed sexual decisions, regardless of sexual orientation.

Purpose of Study

The significance and relevance of this research project is to raise a conscious, critical self-awareness among religious/ministry leaders, parents, and emerging adults of societal and cultural factors that distort God’s gift of sex. From a pedagogical

⁴ Lewis C. Smedes, *Sex for Christians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994), 126-128.

⁵ Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Continuum Press, 1990), 43, 76-77.

⁶ Thomas H. Groome, *Sharing Faith: A Comprehensive Approach to Religious Education and Pastoral Ministry* (San Francisco: Harper, 1991), 280-296.

perspective, the responses of the subjects provide deeper understanding of how American contemporary culture is shaping young adults' understanding of sex and sexuality, including their responses. The further purpose of the study is to challenge and enable readers to act sensitively with moral compassion and cultural intelligence, and to become advocates for moral human dignity and justice in personal, congregational and community settings.

In order to do so, parents and faith communities must provide opportunities to develop a hermeneutical space for "sex talk" dialogue among young adults within the social and cultural changes that our society is facing in the 21st century. These prophetic dialogues must first acknowledge the realities, complexities and challenges we all face daily, living in a sex-saturated culture and society. Secondly, these prophetic dialogues must also foster a safe, honest, open and non-judgmental hermeneutical space for the voiceless and marginalized from a variety of religious, non-religious, social and cultural contexts, to engage in critical, constructive, theological, reflective dialogue.

More profoundly, Christians need to become aware that sex and human sexuality are God's mysterious and beautiful life-giving and life-fulfilling gift. As humans we come from diverse religious and non-religious communities, seeking a way to recognize and embrace sexuality as central and integral to our spirituality and humanity. When Christians do not talk about sex and sexuality, one speaks out against one's own brokenness in favor of exploitive misuse of power, and control of God's good sacred gift of sex. Christians must remember that God is love, and because of His great love for humanity, God sent His son Jesus to heal and restore humanity's broken relationships.

Through God's love, religious and faith communities can help our young adults and society develop an approach to sexual morality that focuses on faithful, committed relationships, honors God, and respects human dignity and social justice, as opposed to a particular sexual ethics from a deontological standpoint. All of God's created beings have the right and responsibility to their sexual lives that reflect expressions of love, justice, respect, dignity, mutuality, equality, commitment, consent, and pleasure. This sexual morality should be grounded in love, mutual respect, and vulnerability, and should foster physical, emotional, and spiritual well-being of each person. Lastly, sexual morality should be extended to all persons who seek guidance regarding their God-given gift of sex without regard to religion, sex, gender, color, disability, marital status, and sexual orientation.

A Call and Motivation for Ministry

“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future”(Jer. 29:11).

I truly believe my spiritual formation began with my beloved grandmother Elsie Scott's strong faith in God. From a more personal conversion viewpoint, the core of my spiritual journey began when I came to an understanding that God loves me enough to send His only son Jesus to die for a wretched sinner such as me. In 2002 my life was transformed reading author Rick Warren's book *A Purpose Driven Life*. At that point in my life, I was a Single Parent Saved Black Woman who struggled and wondered what my purpose in life was. *A Purpose Driven Life* enabled me to understand God's purpose and will for my life, and most importantly that life is not about me. In 2007 I received God's call to ministry with a vision and passion for single adults, and subsequently

pursued a theological education at New York Theological Seminary (NYTS) where I obtained a Certificate in Ministry, Master of Divinity and Master in Religious Education.

My education at NYTS has theologically equipped, empowered, liberated and transformed my life profoundly. This transformation has allowed me to locate my prophetic voice through the transformative power of God's Word. I truly believe it was the Lord who gave me a prophetic voice to provide his message of love and hope to the marginalized and disenfranchised single adult population. My passion and commitment for ministry has always been focused on marginalized, single men and women who are struggling with sexual issues, which is a significantly relevant ministry in our society and culture today. For those reasons, over the past nine years I have made a profound difference by being a voice for the voiceless and addressing the relevant moral issues affecting single adults that churches refuse to address. I believe in my heart that God has given me the authority and responsibility to "go" educate, inform and facilitate resources that will enable, empower, transform and mobilize the community of faith to live changed lives for the building of God's kingdom.

Interests and Future Ministry Endeavors

At this juncture of my theological education, and as a Doctor of Ministry candidate, I am passionately eager to develop my personal call to a "Prophetic Contemporary Single Adults Outreach Ministry" in the context of sex and human sexuality. Employing different aspects of ministry such as educational and motivational/transformational speaking engagements, "Ingrid's Let's Talk Sex Table Forums" will raise a critical awareness concerning the challenges we all struggle and grapple with as sexual beings. In the interim, I would like to develop social media

platforms for discussions, with a vision to teach what I have learned throughout my theological education and the invaluable experiences I have acquired during my dissertation project. In addition, I do aspire to have my own TV “Ingrid’s Let’s Talk Sex Table Forums” Show because I believe it is important to be socially engaged.

As a 21st century leader, I must be relevant and knowledgeable in contemporary cultural and social aspects of our society today. Lastly, I do endeavor to publish a book of my life’s transformational journey, to inspire others to take a risk and follow their dreams, for God has a plan for everyone. I firmly believe religious institutions also need to prepare seminarians to become holistic leaders in every aspect of who they are (sexual beings) as I have become aware that the topic of sex and sexuality is not openly discussed among many future seminarian religious/faith leaders and educators. As people of faith, we must strive to develop a broader understanding of ambiguities and complexities from a biblical, theological and cultural perspective. My hope and desire is to help people of faith and those who seek faith to come to a place of acceptance and belonging, rather than judgment, shame, and ridicule; to speak freely, and embrace our humanity in our sexual expressions as a very good gift from God that ultimately reflects the core essence of God’s *agape* love. This is the core essence of my motivation for ministry and to make disciples of others.

Chapter 2 THE CHALLENGE

It was C. S. Lewis who once said that the traditional Christian injunction against premarital sex “is so difficult and so contrary to our instincts that obviously either Christianity is wrong or our sexual instinct, as it is now, has gone wrong.”⁷ As a theological reflection, I believe C.S. Lewis’s prophetic insights shed light on many of the challenges Christians/non-Christians faces today, especially emerging young adults, as it pertains to sex and human sexuality in the context of premarital sex. As many of us can remember, there was once a time when Christians would feel embarrassed and blushed over topics and conversations about sex! In similar fashion, sermons on fornication and sexual immorality would give one a feeling of fear and obedience to God’s word. Likewise, safe sex talks in public schools would make young people giggle innocently with their friends after class. Well, unfortunately, that is not necessarily the case today among many Christian/non-Christian single young adults. According to Kathleen A. Bogle, an assistant professor of sociology and criminal justice at LaSalle University, consensual sexual encounters known as “hook-ups” are becoming an increasingly normative behavior among adolescents and college-age, young adults which represents

⁷ C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: HarperCollins, 2001), 95.

the cultural shift in openness and acceptance of uncommitted premarital sex within our society.⁸

In correlation with these reports, our focus group research study discussions revealed that casual, premarital sexual encounters are becoming a morally acceptable behavior among many Christian, single, young adults. Evidently, a vast majority of Christian, young adults today are rejecting biblical teachings on sexual matters and are engaging in premarital sexual activities. As an indication, the National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy has revealed that 88% of unmarried young adults have had premarital sex (figure 1). What's more shocking is that 80% who identify themselves as unmarried, Evangelical, young adults have also had premarital sex (figure 2).

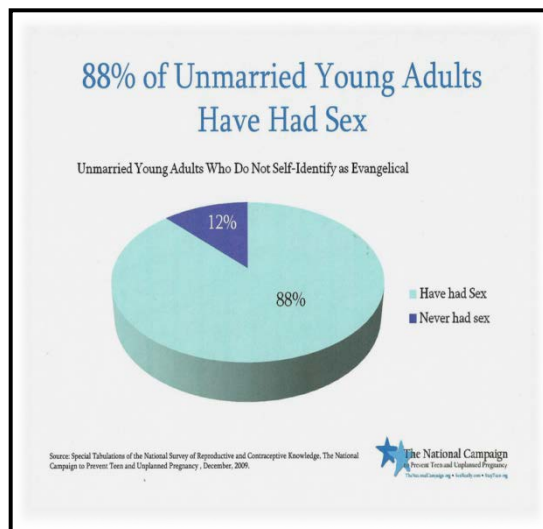


Figure 1 Unmarried Young Adults Who Have Had Sex

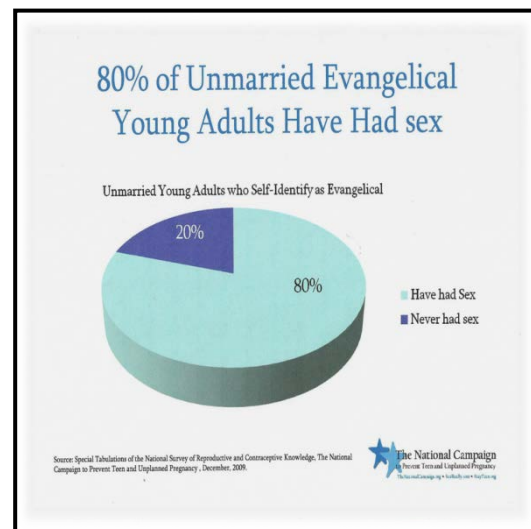


Figure 2 Unmarried Young Adults Who Self-Identify as Evangelical

⁸ Kathleen A. Bogle, *Hooking Up: Sex, Dating, and Relationships on Campus* (New York: New York University Press, 2008), 14-16.

Based on these reports, one can just imagine how public opinion will weigh against the relevance of faith community leaders, in view of what is happening today among adolescents and young adults in our society. On the other hand, many parents/families are becoming frantic about sending their young adults off to college, being fearful that they will become morally influenced and pressured to become immersed in a hookup culture. In our focus group discussions, a majority of Christian, single, young adults believe these immoral sexual behaviors are due to these major reasons (a) influence of culture and the media's portrayals of sex and sexuality, (b) lack of parental guidance on sex related topics, (c) the church's traditional standpoints on expressions of sex and sexuality, and (d) generational differences towards sex and sexuality in our society and culture. Upon reflecting upon these viewpoints, it is plausible to say that one of the greatest challenges facing adolescents and single, young adults today is how the media downplays the moral values and core essence of God's good gift of sex and human sexuality.

One of the more arguable discrepancies among Christian single young adults today is what is considered a sin and good sex in terms of sex and sexuality. This theological consideration seems to be the root problem for many sexually active young adults. We live in a society and culture that not only uses sex to sell everything imaginable, but also promotes an individualism that influences how adolescents and young adults views sex and sexuality. At the same time, a majority of parents and faith community leaders/educators are not addressing moral questions and concerns in their homes and faith communities, while scholars have argued that parents have a greater

influence on how adolescents and young adults view sex and sexuality.⁹ Because of these cultural complexities, most adolescents and young adults are pressured to make individual sexual decisions, based on popular cultural perspective, which is evident in our study.

In terms of faith communities, this brings us to question why a majority of churches today continue to remain silent on moral sexual issues. It is reasonable to say that the church's injunctions toward sex and sexuality poses obstacles for parents/families to talk with their adolescents/young adults about God's good gift of sex and human sexuality. Because of these challenges and concerns, many focus group participants have expressed that some of their friends have disassociated themselves from religious institutions that have no convictions and compassion towards those who seek understanding or have different theological views on sexually related matters. Similarly, the young adults in our study strongly believe that church leaders should seek human justice with integrity in respect to sex and sexuality, regardless of one's sexual expression and sexual orientation.

They also added that older generational views on sex and sexuality are based on old-fashioned traditions. In like manner, most of the Christian young adults are inclined to associate with liberal churches that have an open theological viewpoint on what the Bible has to say about the traditional views of sex and sexuality. They maintain that churches should not impose their doctrinal teachings on sex and sexuality, but should rather give reasons for their beliefs and give young adults the freedom and right to make their own judgments and decisions about their God given gift of sex and human sexuality.

⁹ Amy T. Schalet, *Not Under My Roof: Parents, Teens, and the Culture of Sex* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 181.

Most young adults today are viewing moral issues from a moral relativist viewpoint which they see as differences in moral judgment. The fact that most Christian and non-Christian young adults today are rejecting the notion that premarital sexual activity is a sin is a good example of this lens of moral relativism.

Unquestionably, the church has had a long history of being prudish, negative, and condemnatory on topics of sex and human sexuality. Many of the church's injunctions toward premarital sex and expressions of sexuality can be attributed to the Church Father, Saint Augustine of Hippo. In fact, he wrestled with his own sexual desires, and struggled to control his immoral sexual behaviors. Augustine somehow equated sin with sex and believed marital sexual intercourse is a sinful act which can be morally tolerated if the sexual act is for procreation only.¹⁰ Centuries later, Augustine's corrupted philosophical sexual ethics have remained embedded in Christian theology. Since then, God's good gift of sex has become the most misunderstood, misinterpreted, controversial and problematic taboo topic for 21st century Christians. Then again, because of these controversies, it provides great opportunities for critical theological and hermeneutical dialogues to seek a fresh exposition in the Christian message, as it relates to sex and human sexuality in the context of premarital sex. In view of the overall realities, beliefs, sexual attitudes and viewpoints among participants, a critical analysis of the challenges presented indicated these key contributing factors:

- Christian and non-Christian Single young adults today are sexually active.
- From a moral relativist viewpoint they reject the notion that premarital sexual activity is a sin.

¹⁰ Serene Jones and Paul F. Lakeland, *Constructive Theology: A Contemporary Approach to Classical Themes: A Project on the Workgroup on Constructive Theology* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2005), 140.

- Cultural shifts, generational differences, societal morality, individualism.
- Media the dominant source of sex education in our culture and society.
- Most parents are not providing guidance on sexual issues confronting adolescents and young adults.
- Traditional Christian injunctions against premarital sex and sexuality.
- Religious/faith communities are silent on moral issues affecting adolescents and young adults.

For reasons based on these overwhelming contributing factors, one can understand why many adolescents and young adults are engaging in a variety of sexual practices. It is evident that the topics of sex and human sexuality in the context of premarital sex is a challenging, relevant, educational and informative topic that should be a significant concern and interest to parents, religious educators including Single Adults Ministry leaders as myself. As the study has critically analyzed and presented the challenges, it is equally important for one to grasp a conceptual understanding of the young adults in our society and culture.

CHAPTER 3 REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Millennials Overview

As we have become aware of the challenges presented in our research study, it is essential to ascertain a conceptual understanding of key factors which we believe have shaped and influenced the Christian, single, young adults' beliefs and perceptions of sex and human sexuality in the context of premarital sex. As a starting point, the literature review will provide us with the young adults' basic characteristics, core values, social and cultural views from a generational cohort perspective. In theory, a generational cohort includes people who share historical or social life experiences and which explains changes that affect the values, attitudes, beliefs, and inclinations of those individuals.¹¹ As such, we recognize that the young adult population is too broad and diverse to be constricted, but the fact is they do convey obvious truths that say any group of people in a certain era, will develop certain traits and commonalities.¹²

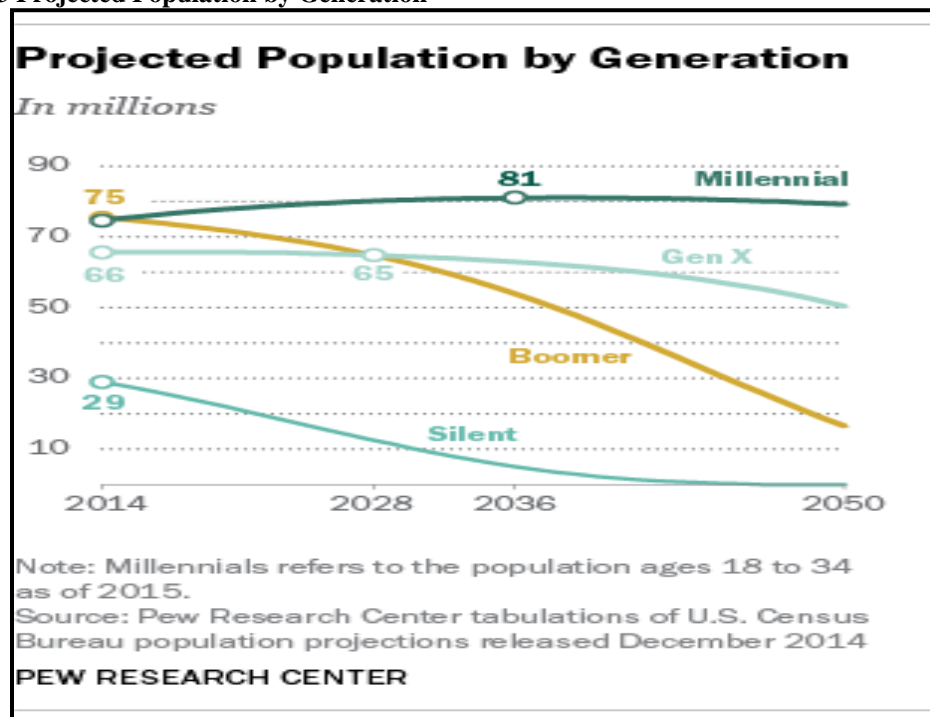
Although there will be exceptions to specific trends we identify in our research study, we believe we can all learn some key facets of the Millennials, aged 18-29 years, in support of the research study. According to historians and authors Neil Howe and William Strauss, the Millennial young adults, or (Generation Y, The Great Generation)

¹¹ William Strauss and Neil Howe, *Millennials Rising: The Next Great Generation* (New York: Vintage Book 2000), 40-41.

¹² Tom Beaudoin, *Virtual Faith: The Irreverent Spiritual Quest of Generation X* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass 1998), 21.

were born between 1982 and 2004.¹³ American psychologist Jeffrey Arnett uses the phrase “Emerging Adulthood” or (Adults) to describe the Millennials because they are transitioning from their adolescent development into adulthood.¹⁴ According to the Pew Research Center, the millennial cohort is the largest generation in the United States and is the biggest living generation in our nation’s history. They are also forecast to exceed the enormous Baby boomers shown in figure 3.¹⁵

Figure 3 Projected Population by Generation



As the largest generation in the U.S., the Millennials were considered special since birth and grew up in a society that placed high value on children, which is reflected in bright yellow “Baby on Board” signs, Cabbage Patch Dolls in 1983, and most popular

¹³ Ibid., 19.

¹⁴ Jeffrey J. Arnet, “Emerging Adulthood: A Theory of Development from the Late Teens through the Twenties, *American Psychologist* 55, no. 5 (May 2000): 469-480.

¹⁵ Richard Fry, “This year Millennials will overtake Baby Boomers,” Pew Research Center, January 16, 2015, <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/01/16/this-year-millennials-will-overtake-baby-boomers/> (March 6, 2016).

TV show like “Barney and Friends.”¹⁶ The Millennials were also often sheltered, shielded, and protected by their “helicopter parents” from failures and the hardships of their childhood experience.¹⁷ This could be due to the fact that they were raised in a time when drugs, violence, and terrorism became the realities of life. In any case, they were “drawn to their families for safety and security . . . and were also encouraged to make their own choices, and were also taught to question authority.”¹⁸ More significantly, the Millennials were born and raised in a technologically advanced world, of computers, internet, social media, cell phones, and many electronic games. These technologies have given them a wide spectrum of opportunity to impact the world and acquire immense knowledge with just a touch of a finger or click of a mouse.

Strauss and Howe are of the opinion that these technological opportunities provide the Millennials with positive social habits in a diverse cultural environment that gives them a sense of confidence and empowerment. However, from our research study, we believe that Millennials’ sense of confidence and how they were encouraged by their parents to make their own choices and question authority could explain their moral attitudes towards sex and sexuality, as the cultural shifts within our society, along with technological social habits, in a diverse cultural environment, can be empowering for emerging adults to conform to the cultural norms.

¹⁶ Beaudoin, *Virtual Faith*, 31, 36.

¹⁷ William Strauss and Neil Howe, *Generations: The History of America’s Future 1584 to 2069* (New York: William Morrow & Company 1991), 342.

¹⁸ Debra Garber, “Understanding the Influence of Millennials on Your Social Media Marketing Strategy,” dlvr.it (blog), April 12, 2015, <https://blog.dlvrit.com/2015/04/millennials-influence-on-social/> (accessed November 3, 2015)

According to Strauss and Howe, the Millennials have grown to develop seven distinguishable traits—special, sheltered, confident, team-oriented, achieving, pressured, and conventional—which makes them unique and different from previous generations.¹⁹ Based on our observations, they are being pressured to be unique, which is an aspect of individualism. They are indeed different from previous generations, and in many ways they are going against the traditional norms related to sex and sexuality, with unlimited access to the internet/social media.

Pew Research reported that around 81 percent of Millennials are on Facebook—averaging a number of two hundred fifty friends²⁰—as well as other social media platforms such as Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube that we believe can have both a positive and negative influence from a cultural and social perspective. Most noticeable, as a cohort, they are more affluent, better educated, teamwork-oriented and modest with good conduct, and are expected to transform their image from pessimistic, narcissist, and alienated to being upbeat and engaging, as they develop into adulthood, and in time, to power.²¹ Further, like previous generations, many social events have impacted and shaped their generational personality. Despite of the tragic events that have shaped their lives as a generation, they are considered hopeful and optimistic.²²

¹⁹ Strauss and Howe, *Generations*, 317.

²⁰ Pew Research Center, “Generations in the Next America Event Video,” Pew Research Centers Social Demographic Trends Project RSS, March 7, 2014, <http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2014/03/07/millennials-in-adulthood/> (accessed October 18, 2015).

²¹ Strauss and Howe, *Millennials*, 4.

²² *Ibid.*, 7.

- September 11, 2001
- 2003/2004 Introduction to Social Networking; (MySpace, Facebook, Cyworld, Bebo)
- 2007 Innovation in technology (Apple Products)
- Computers and technology
- TV talk shows
- Oklahoma City bombing
- Increased parental emphasis on child rearing
- Schoolyard violence (Columbine, etc.)
- Diversity
- Extended family relationships
- Environmental impact awareness
- Rise of social media (MySpace, Friendster, Facebook)
- Google founding as a search engine
- Video games
- Desert Storm²³

We believe that because, rather than in spite of, the tragic events listed above, they have overcome as a generation and have developed positive values with a pluralistic nature that acknowledges multiculturalism as a lifestyle.²⁴ In the process of developing their core values, they have also become the most tolerant cohort, due to their pluralistic nature, openness to multiculturalism and interactions with various ethnic, religious, social, and sexual groups within their generation's population. They are interested in a wide range of theological beliefs, convictions and moral relativist viewpoints, as we have seen throughout our study. Accordingly, they have no tolerance for those who are

²³ Robert Tanner, "15 Influential Events that Shaped Generation Y," <https://managementisajourney.com/15-influential-events-that-shaped-generation-y-infographic/> (accessed December 8, 2015).

²⁴ Chuck Bomar, *Worlds Apart: Understanding the Mindset and Values of 18-25 Year Olds* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), Kindle Edition: Kindle Location 243.

judgmental of the individuals who are distinctive; and comprehensiveness, differences, and political rightness are the standards that have formed their convictions.²⁵

Perspectives on Relationship and Marriage

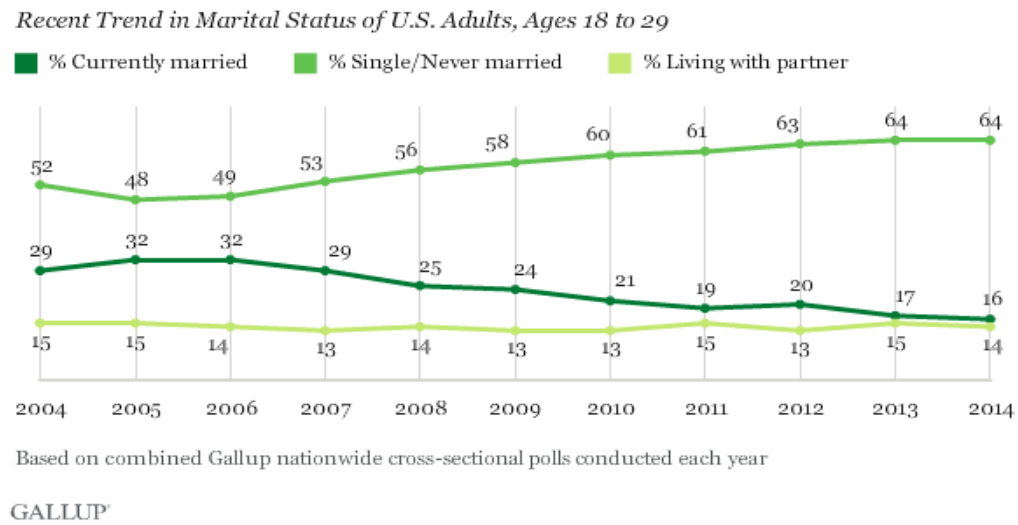
Today, Millennials are emerging into adulthood with an assortment of social, cultural, and religious points of view about our society and culture. Studies have shown that a huge market share of young adults are engaging in relationships with a lackadaisical approach, and are dismissing the traditional standard of marriage. As we have already suspected, the reasons why conventional relationships are changing among emerging adults has a lot to do with their views on premarital sex—hooking up or friends with benefits—uncommitted, consensual, casual, sexual experiences.²⁶ According to a Gallup Poll on marriage trends, fewer young adults aged 18-29 year olds (exact ages of young adults in our focus group) are in a committed relationship. This indicates that fewer young adults today are married, a fact that is consistent with this age group. But at the same time, the majority of single young adults who are not cohabiting has increased dramatically in the previous decade, from 52% in 2004 to 64% in 2014 (figure 4).²⁷

²⁵ Ibid, Loc. 171.

²⁶ Ibid., Loc. 23-24.

²⁷ Lydia Saad, “Fewer Young People Say I Do—to Any Relationship,” *Gallup*, June 8, 2015, <http://www.gallup.com/poll/183515/fewer-young-people-say-relationship.aspx> (accessed February 11, 2015).

Figure 4 Gallup Poll Marriage Trends



This also suggests that a majority of young adults 18-29 years old are not ready to get married, and are not living with a partner. In our study focus group, a great majority of participants expressed that they need to ensure there is chemistry and intimacy in their relationship before they say “I do.”

Attitudes, Beliefs and Perceptions of Premarital Sex

In light of what we have previously discussed concerning premarital sex among Christian/non-Christian single young adults, studies have shown that attitudes toward premarital sex in the U.S. have not changed as significantly as one might presume. The study further gives three conceivable clarifications and reasons for changes in sexual behaviors: (1) because of the generational substitution of a more traditionalist to a more liberal one; (2) age-related changes in perspective of all generational cohorts; and (3) cultural changes that modify the perspectives of all these generations.²⁸ We presumed these factors could attribute to why Christian young adults today are developing another

²⁸ David J. Harding and Christopher Jencks, “Changing Attitudes Toward Premarital Sex: Cohort, Period, and Aging Effects,” *The Public Opinion Quarterly* 67, no. 2 (2003): 211–226, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3521631> (accessed January 14, 2016).

standard for their entitlement to participate in premarital sex. Smedes also asserted that more single adults are saying yes to premarital sex, despite the fact that God says no, which we have established so far in our study. Past studies done by Ira Reiss had indicated that most college-age, single adults accept sex as morally right if two people have a deep affection one another. Kinsey surprised most Americans in 1953 when he wrote that men and women under 25 years old were occupied with premarital sex during that time. Long before “hookups,” young adults acknowledged earnest sexual affection as the moral standard for sex.²⁹

Emergence of “Hookup” Culture

Hookup society is not a 21st century invention, but surfaced out of a broader 1920s social movement throughout North America that challenged the conventional models of courting under parental supervision, and thus, dating turned out to be extremely lenient during that time.³⁰ Beginning in the 1930s and lasting until the late 1960s, oversight laws were established to confine the sexual delineation of sensual uncommitted sexual coexistence in movies.³¹ Many researchers agree that the sexual revolution of the 1960s-1980s, otherwise called the season of sexual freedom and free love, denoted a period in history that renounced what people had beforehand seen as conventional sexual standards. The depiction of sexuality became more common in visual

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Rebecca D. Stinson, “Hooking Up in Young Adulthood: A Review of Factors Influencing the Sexual Behavior of College Students,” *Journal of College Student Psychotherapy* 24 (2010): 98-115, doi: 10.1080/87568220903558596.

³¹ Patrick Robertson, *Film Facts* (New York: Billboard Books; 2001).

media; as pictures of uncommitted, casual sex made their way into 21st century mainstream culture.³²

Sex, Sexuality and Media

We firmly believe the media and reality TV does have a negative influence in the lives of many young adults, particularly adolescents. Most recent pop and hip-hop artists, singers and songwriters such as Miley Cyrus, Robin Thicke, and Rihanna Fenty use sexual lyrics that attract and captivate the attention of adolescents and young adults that can create a negative view of sex and sexuality. Similarly, the media have always highlighted uncommitted sexual experiences found in movies such as *Hooking Up* in 2009 that delineates the turbulent sentimental and sexual existences of youthful characters; and *No Strings Attached* in 2011 that depicted the uncommitted negotiations of sex, between two companions who endeavor to arrange a sexual non-romantic part of their relationship.³³ Clearly, we have identified the social and cultural environment that promotes uncommitted casual sex that is occurring in colleges among the emerging adults. Most frequently, these social media platforms depict casual, uncommitted sex as an adequate method for participating in premarital sex, with no thought for the sexual advancement of teenagers and Christian young adults which is key in our study.

³² Edward Laumann, John H. Gagnon, Robert T. Michael, and Stuart Michaels, *The Social Organization of Sexuality: Sexual Practices in the United States* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press; 1994).

³³ Victor C. Strasburger, "Adolescents, Sex, and the Media: Ooooo, baby, baby—A Q&A," *Adolescent Medicine Clinics* 16 (2005): 269-288, doi: 10.1016/j.admecli.2005.02.009.

Religion and Millennials

Almost 29 percent of young adults between the ages 18-33 say they are not associated with any religion, while 11 percent said they don't have faith in God.³⁴ These reports are certainly not a surprise to our study based on young adults' attitudes towards the church. Their disaffiliation could conceivably clarify their attitudes, convictions and view of sex, relationship, and marriage. A Barna research survey revealed that young adults that (a) church congregation is judgmental (87%), (b) very deceptive (85%), (c) against gay persons (91%) and (d) were inhumane to others (70%). Based on the young adults' perceptions of the Church, Barna concludes that these negative views of the congregation are reflective of poor leadership within the church.³⁵ It is likely, therefore, that a larger portion of young adults today will choose new places of worship because of their disappointments with former or present church leadership and authority.

Silence, Sex and the Church

Why has the language of sex and human sexuality been an unthinkable dialect in our houses of worship, despite the fact that sex and human sexuality is a critical aspect of our human experience? According to sexologist Robert T. Francoeur, it was Augustine who equated sex with disgrace and sin in his works in the fourth and fifth century.³⁶ This equation of sex equals disgrace has helped create a culture of silence and judgment in our

³⁴ Anugrah Kumar, "Millennial Generation Less Religious, More Liberal, Pew Study Shows," *CP (Christian Post) U.S.*, March 8, 2014, <http://www.christianpost.com/news/millennial-generation-less-religious-more-liberal-pew-study-shows-115833/> (accessed December 10, 2015).

³⁵ Barna Research Group, "What Millennials Want When They Visit Church," March 4, 2015, <https://www.barna.org/barna-update/millennials/711-what-millennials-want-when-they-visit-church#.Vrg9Cs74Pv8> (accessed November 15, 2015).

³⁶ Robert T. Francoeur, ed., *A Descriptive Dictionary and Atlas of Sexology* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1991), 179, 698.

houses of worship. Over the centuries the church has invalidated individuals and devastated their thoughts and words with the audacity to instruct the suppression of individual sexual expression.³⁷

Sex and Sexuality: The Cycle of Shame

Throughout the centuries, Christians have separated their sexual selves from their human sexuality. According to David Schnarch, in his book *Constructing the Sexual Crucible*:

The sex affirming Hebraic roots of Western civilization has been masked by Augustine's legacy of eroticism-hating sexual dualism, perpetuated by authoritarian-rooted Christian dogma, which negated the basic worthiness of human beings. The evolution of Western culture is a history of theologically based sexual oppression.³⁸

Similarly, Thomas Moore an American psychotherapist, and previously minister, made a profound statement in his book titled *The Soul of Sex: Cultivating Life as an Act of Love* stating that the society we live in isolates sexuality to the point where we frequently attempt to remove sexuality from other pieces of life until we disregard our own particular human sexuality. This conscious or unconscious behavior will naturally appear in unexpected and undesirable ways, such as shameless sexual practices, explicit entertainment, unlawful issues, promiscuous sexual behavior, and prostitution—leaving one with shame and guilt.³⁹ Also, from our perspective, these approaches to God's good gift of sex and sexuality can lead to the alienation and dehumanization of God's created beings who are seeking biblical understanding and guidance on sexual matters. It is

³⁷ Charles R. Haines, *Sappho: The Poems And Fragments* (London: George Routledge & Sons, 1926), 6.

³⁸ David M. Schnarch, *Constructing the Sexual Crucible* (New York: WW Norton, 1991), 548.

³⁹ Thomas Moore, *The Soul of Sex: Cultivating Life as an Act of Love* (New York: Harper-Collins, 1998), 198-199.

almost unimaginable that after the sexual liberation of the 1960s and its dialogue with various sexual matters that the majority of churches today are still silent on topics of sex and sexuality. By not addressing the moral issues of sex and sexuality in our society and churches, we only suppress the physiological and spiritual aspects of ourselves, children and young adults. As a matter of fact, this kind of suppression has led to more complications than most of us are willing to admit and recognize.

So then, why are churches not using their divine human efforts to collaboratively share and appropriate human knowledge for justice and human dignity? Somehow, it would appear that many religious/faith leaders do not know how to engage in mutual dialogues, especially on sex-related issues. Figuratively speaking, it seems like Christian leaders have lost compassion and their reasonable sense of what the ultimate good or goal is for human life. We can no longer hold tight to Augustine's philosophically radical beliefs of sex and human sexuality, as well as claiming we know God's truth about sex. The only truth we all know is that God said it is very good, and God gave each of us the gift of sex, and that is the ultimate truth.

John Caputo, one of the leading philosophers of religion, and a prophetic voice on postmodernism; argues that Jesus was a deconstructionist who acted upon love. Therefore, it is vital for religious/faith leaders to understand deconstruction as the hermeneutics of the kingdom of God, and envision what this concept would look like in the hands of Jesus as related to the Church. Through these lenses one must see deconstruction as the experience of the impossible in search of human justice. As faith leaders, we are commanded to go into the world as one of God's agents of reconciliation and hope, especially when we are faced with challenges and, not to challenge the

church's traditional beliefs, but to reason biblically and logically, for human dignity and the integrity of the church and allegiance to God. Most essentially, I firmly agree and support efforts for comprehensive prophetic "sex talk," and hope our research study will initiate a conscious critical awareness for families, religious leaders/educators, on sex related issues.

Sex and Sexuality Education: Parents, Adolescents and Young Adults

Parents and families who seek appropriate sex education and guidance should be able to obtain information without feeling embarrassed, judged or guilty. On that note, Kinnaman stated a key point that the reasons Christians neglect to give direction and sex instruction to their adolescents/young adults, can be connected to the shame associated with sex and how our society and culture exploits every aspect of sex and sexuality. In a general sense, he unequivocally believes that young adults today will dismiss any sex education and guidance if they do not regard it as mutual learning.⁴⁰ As we all know by now, any form of teaching or education using an authoritative standpoint—"Thus saith the Lord," and "Thou Salt Not"—will not have a positive-leaning growth transformation. As a Single Adults Ministry leader I often experience this authoritative standpoint within the church, which they perceive as teachings on sex and sexuality. While discussing topics on sex within my singles ministry, members in the group became very uncomfortable to the point of being defensive because they felt sex is private and should not be discussed in the church. On the other hand, it was quite a different experience among the young adults in our focus group discussions. At first they were not quite sure what to expect, but the simple inclusion of a dialogue made a significant difference.

⁴⁰ Ibid, 45.

Because I took the time to listen without being judgmental, they became very receptive and were able to express their thoughts and experience on the topic of sex. Too often parents and faith community leaders underestimate and undermine the wealth of knowledge, concerns and questions our children would like to express, because we have become so habituated to the negative views of sex throughout our lives. In all honesty they have taught me much more than I thought I knew.

Current literature on sexuality and sex education in the church can be summed up in terms of: (a) the impact of media on contemporary society (b) the congregation's hush on sexual matters, (b) the Church's viewpoints on premarital sex and marriage (c) absence of "sex talk" dialogue on relevant moral issues confronting the young adults population today, and (d) the trouble in discussing sex with parents/families and in their churches.

Although the history of premarital sex, hookups, and companions with advantages is not a twentieth century creation, young adult reclassification and comprehension of sex and human sexuality in connection to premarital sex are unequivocally conflicting with customary perspectives of past generations. Young adults find themselves in conflict with the very adults who raised them and urged not to settle for less than their own decisions and to question power. Furthermore, being the biggest generation era ever, they have a more prominent, favorable position of being liberal and free about affection and connections, paying little heed to race or sexual orientations as defined in our popular contemporary society.

While socio-political scholars continue debating how culture offers just a proximate level of clarification for human sexual conduct, this study endeavored to get a

handle on the key contributing variables that impact and shape the young adults' attitudes, convictions and view of sex and premarital sexuality. More profoundly, we have come to realize and embrace that our 21st century young adults are looking for love, acceptance and guidance, as well as an understanding of who they are while they battle to comprehend their God-given gift of sex and human sexuality.

CHAPTER 4

GOD’S CREATION: SEX AND HUMAN SEXUALITY

Throughout the centuries up to the present, sex and human sexuality has been one of the most controversial, yet profoundly interesting, topics that have challenged Christian beliefs. I will attempt to provide a brief summary to mitigate the negative views of sex and sexuality and to set a stage in support of this demonstration project. From a biblical perspective, a Christian understanding of human identity is grounded in the creation stories in the book of Genesis 1-3. In the first account (Gen 1-2), the priestly narrative presents us with the goodness of God’s created order. The story also tells us of our creation and origin as human beings with an elucidation of the nature of sexuality, which is a central part of who we are. The text tells us that we are fashioned by God in His own image and are created male and female (1:27). Then in (1:28) God blessed male and female and told them to be fruitful and multiply. Unlike the rest of God’s creation, the sexual differences between man and woman are pronounced “very good” (1:31), which affirms that human sex and sexuality is a good gift and blessing from God. So, from the beginning of creation our human sexual identity is reciprocal, meaning one’s own human nature is properly understood in complementary relationship to another, who is alike in nature and opposite sexually.

Further, the Yahwist narrative in (Gen. 2:4b-3:24) gives us more details and informs us that man was created from dust, then woman from the rib of the man. The narrative also tells us of our human disobedience and corruptions within the creation story. In the beginning, humanity identity is neither feminine nor masculine, for the

Hebrew word for man in (2:7) is *adam*, meaning humanity or mankind.⁴¹ Then the Lord God said. “It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make a helper as his partner.” So, one would wonder why (a) the Lord told the man he will make him a helper as his partner (2:18), (b) knowing it is not good that the man should be alone, (c) but injected the creation of woman, (d) formed the animals, and told the man to name them, and most notably, the man did not name any of the animals woman. Something very interesting happened between vs.18-19, because the Lord God did not immediately create a helper as a partner for the man. Instead, he created the animals and instructed the man to name them. I believe this is where the man (humanity) first became aware of human sexuality. While the man named the animals, he possibly realized the animals were not a suitable helper as a partner of him. The word “helper” in the text is a relational term that appoints a mutual beneficial relationship, pertaining to God, people, and animals.⁴² Plausibly, the man observed and realized that...hmmm, every living animal had a mate and companion and could reproduce, except for him (2:20).

When the Lord God created woman, the man was finally able to express his human sexuality in a song, and also differentiated the sexes, by calling her woman (2:22-24). However, there are scholars and theologians who contend that Adam and Eve’s conscious awareness of sexual intercourse was due to their disobedience by eating the forbidden fruit (3:7).⁴³ Others argue that this assumption presumes that sex and sexuality

⁴¹ Miguel De La Torre, *A Lily Among the Thorns: Imagining a New Christian Sexuality* (San Francisco: John Wiley & Sons, 2007), 19.

⁴² Umberto Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Genesis*, Part 1 (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1961), 142f.

⁴³ Cuthbert A. Simpson, “The Book of Genesis: Introduction and Exegesis,” *The Interpreters Bible*, vol. 1 (New York: Abingdon Press, 1952), 485-486.

is shameful and was not a part of the Lord's will and plan in his creation.⁴⁴

Hermeneutically, the idea that our human consciousness of sexual intercourse happened after the Fall would definitely be a biblical misread and misinterpretation. The fact that a helper was not found as a suitable partner for Adam's (2:20) clearly tells us that God planned for humans to have sexual intercourse. Also, in the Priestly narrative (1:28) God blessed male and female and told them to be fruitful, meaning you have my blessings, go and have sexual intercourse.

I also believe because of Adam and Eve's disobedience, fear and shame came in the world; since then, sex and sexuality has been associated with shame, and the fear of being judged. For example, after their disobedience (3:6), they heard the sound of the Lord God walking, and Adam and Eve hid themselves (3:8). Subsequently, they became afraid, hid themselves from their Creator, and begun to blame each other for their sinful behaviors. In actuality, the Lord God did not tell the couple they committed a sexual sin, but clearly stated that their curse (3:14) was the result of their disobedience. As disobedience alienated Adam and Eve from God, our human alienation from sex and sexuality have separated us from self, neighbor, and God (3:12-14). The story tells us how we have blamed each other for our own disobedience and developed our negative ideologies of sex and human sexuality since the beginning of Creation. More significantly, because we were created in the image of God, we are intertwined, and our sexual alienation has separated us from self, neighbor and God. So, as a result of our human disobedience, and how we interpret the text, sex and sexuality feels separated

⁴⁴ Stephen Sapp, *Sexuality, the Bible, and Science* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977), 18.

from our bodies, and we subsequently experience alienation from our God given gift of sex and human sexuality.

As such, sex and sexuality has lost its moral quality as the will to communion. Instead, sexuality becomes one's anxious quest for pleasures and self-worth, to the point where even our human conscious thoughts are not immune to the influences of sexual self-alienation, which can be seen in our relationships with others. By virtue, sex and sexuality is a significant and essential attribute of our human nature; but by no means, did our Creator intend it to be the defining characteristic of our humanness. By God's grace, human sexuality both enriches and fulfills our personhood. As a result of humankind's Fall from innocence (Genesis 3), the complementary nature of human sexuality and all other human relationships has been distorted. In truth, Adam and Eve's disobedience did not only lead to death and separation from God our Creator, but it also alienated human beings from one another, and distorted the sexual relationships between man and woman. The creation story also tells us that we have sacrificed the closeness of a personal relationship with our Lord God, and have become creatures of oppression. But we also see a creator who is at work, and his purpose for humanity has not been defeated, and has brought us back with love and compassion depicted in John 3:16.

The Early Church and Sex

Now that we have come to an understanding of God's creation of sex and human sexuality, one wonders why Christianity has had a long history of being extremely negative and condemnatory about sex and human sexuality. As mentioned earlier, this negativity can be traced to the influence of the Early Church Fathers and the church father who has molded the negative Christian attitudes toward sex more than any other is

Saint Augustine of Hippo. In his *Confessions*, he expressed his struggles against carnal pleasures, marriage and gender. In order to understand Augustine's philosophical views, one must understand the early Church's historical, social and political setting, and how it shaped Augustine's interpretation in Old Testament scriptures. For Augustine, sex and gender were viewed through the lens of Adam and Eve's first sin and disobedience against God in the Garden of Eden. Augustine's philosophical view of original sin is rooted in the Greek world of philosophy and can be traced back to Greek philosophy and Platonic thought which believed human beings are composed of two parts consisting of the soul that is good and the body, which is bad.

This dualistic philosophy has influenced Christianity throughout the centuries with a movement known as Gnosticism that believed salvation could be gained through special knowledge. This heretical religious movement taught that all matter including the human body was evil and that only the spark of the divine soul is good. Only through special knowledge (*gnosis*) can this goodness be accessed. Even with these dualistic philosophical beliefs, Augustine became involved with a woman who was not considered his partner in lawful marriage, because he claimed to have found her in a state of warding desire, and thought she was the only girl for him and remained faithful to her.⁴⁵ During the course of their illicit relationship, Augustine's unnamed mistress conceived and bore him an illegitimate son, whom he named *Adeodatus* or "Gift of God". Thereafter, at some point it became clear that Augustine would not marry his unnamed lover and the couple subsequently ended their illicit relationship.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Augustine of Hippo, *Confessions*, trans. Henry Chadwick (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), Ch. 7: 16.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, Ch. 4: 2.

Based on that relationship and experience, he also claimed to learn the differences between the partnership of marriage for the sake of having a family and mutual consent of love as a matter of physical sex. It is important to note that in those days Christian ethics were very important due to the moral and disciplinary problems that were associated with sexual desires, and as a result, the church required Christians to be monogamous and remain faithful to one spouse. In spite of this, Augustine, who confessed to having an illegitimate son and struggled and grappled with strong sexual desires, could become the most influential writer on Christian sexual ethics in the history of Western Christendom. Over the centuries, Augustine's philosophical viewpoints and struggles with his sexual desires have become overwhelmingly adopted, not only by Roman Catholics but also by Christians in general, imposing his biblical interpretations upon Christianity and the negative stigma of sex.

Sex: Augustine's Notion of Original Sin

For Augustine, the notion of original sin in Christian theology is ascribed to the first sin committed by Adam in the Garden of Eden. This philosophical belief and understanding of original sin led Augustine to believe that sin is transmitted from generation to generation through the act of procreation. Further, Augustine developed a philosophical understanding that the human sexual drive cannot always be rationally controlled due to the result of sin. So he speculated maybe if sin had not come into the world by Adam, then marital intercourse could be without the excitement of human sexual desires. Augustine thought that the male semen could enter into the womb of a woman naturally without the heat of sexual passion, similar to the natural menstrual flow of blood from the womb of a woman. Based on this philosophical belief, Augustine

asserted that humans have powerful sex drives, which he inferred as lust in the act of sexual intercourse, and which he believed was a necessary evil act to bring children into the world.⁴⁷

Augustine's contradictory philosophical notion of original sin is derived from Romans 5:12 (NRSV). In the text, Paul stated that "sin came into the world through one man and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all men sinned." However, what Paul alluded to and affirmed in the text is the fact that humanity shares in Adam's sin and death, even though he did not make an attempt to explain how sin and death spread to all. Augustine, who knew very little Greek, decided to use the Latin translation and mistranslated, misinterpreted what Paul meant, and developed his own doctrine of original sin, which he understood as how sin was passed biologically from Adam to all his descendants through the sexual act itself, equating all sexual desire with sin. In actuality, Paul did not make any allusion to sexual procreation as the channel through which humankind has become partakers of Adam's sin and death. In theory, Paul's concern and objective, was to affirm the fundamental truth that, through Adam's and Eve's disobedience, humanity have become sinners; and through Christ's obedience, on the Cross, He has made us righteous: "For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by one man's obedience many will be made righteous" (Rom 5:19).⁴⁸

From a theological and hermeneutical perspective, it would appear that Augustine's views and standpoint of God's good gift of sex is indeed a response to his personal sexual struggles and desires, which seemed to deeply affect his ideological

⁴⁷ Saint Augustine, *The City of God*, trans. Henry Bettenson (Harmondsworth, England: Penguin Books, 1972), 354-430.

⁴⁸ William E. Phipps, *Was Jesus Married?* (New York, Harper & Row 1970), 175.

understanding of sexual intercourse and procreation. As a result, today many of Augustine's philosophical views are greatly regarded by Christians as the authoritative interpretation of the Bible, and has provided many heated debates throughout the centuries. At some point we need to ask ourselves whether Augustine's biblical philosophical and ideological standpoints on God's good gift of sex, are biblically logical and justifiable in the 21st century.

Brief Historical Perspective on Sex and Human Sexuality

The history and richness of sex and human sexuality cannot be properly articulated in this study. However, I will give a brief overview and understanding of our God-given gift of sex and human sexuality. Since antiquity no society in the world has ever sanctioned free sexual behavior and all societies have utilized a variety of ways for regulating and expressing sexual behavior. Ancient Israel understood and believed that sex is a positive gift from God. For Jews, the affirmation of sex was reflected in a couple's wedding celebration, which affirmed the commencement of their sexual lives together. This affirmation of sex is in contrast to Greek dualism between spirit and matter, which viewed sexual intercourse as sinful and evil. For instance, immediately after a couple's wedding celebration, the newly married Jewish couple would make love on an immaculate white sheet. However, within Jewish laws in those days, it was customary to make sure there was blood on the sheet to provide evidence of the couple's marriage (Deut 22:13-19), particularly to prove that the bride was a virgin.

This clearly illustrated how ancient Israel viewed sex as God's good gift of pleasure and procreation within marriage. This affirmation and expressions of sex and sexuality are articulated in romantic words depicted in the Songs of Solomon, "I am my

beloved's, and his desire is for me. Come, my beloved, let us go forth into the fields and lodge in the villages; let us go out early to the vineyard. There I will give you my love (Songs of Solomon 7:10-12).

Sex and Human Sexuality in Greco-Roman Culture

In Greco-Roman society, sex and human sexuality was not prohibited within their culture.⁴⁹ However, from a moral perspective they were more concerned with the traditional customs that affected all aspects of Roman life such as culture, philosophy, ethics and virtues.⁵⁰ In actuality, shame and modesty became regulating factors in their human behaviors,⁵¹ and public officials had the power to remove citizens due to their sexual misconduct, and to legally structure certain sexual transgressions.⁵² Some sexual attitudes and behaviors differ in later Western societies⁵³ to the point where even Roman religion embraced and promoted sexuality for religious individuals to improve their erotic lives including procreation. As such, prostitution became legal for men to satisfy their sexual urges, pornographic paintings became art collections for the wealthy,⁵⁴ and homosexuality was largely viewed as normative and permissible.⁵⁵

⁴⁹ Rebecca Langlands, *Sexual Morality in Ancient Rome* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 17.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 20.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 17.

⁵² Karl J. Holkeskamp, *Reconstructing the Roman Republic: An Ancient Political Culture and Modern Research* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010), 17-18.

⁵³ John R. Clarke, *Looking at Lovemaking: Constructions of Sexuality in Roman Art 100 B.C.-A.D. 250* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998, 2001), 11.

⁵⁴ Thomas A. McGinn, *The Economy of Prostitution in the Roman World* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2004), 164.

⁵⁵ Craig Williams, *Roman Homosexuality* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 304.

According to Foucault, sex and human sexual behavior was governed by restraints throughout Greco-Roman world, which he believed was an art to control ⁵⁶ that suppressed human sexual desires and pleasure, while Roman culture began to have a positive, healthy perspective towards sexuality. Many treatises on human sexuality were developed, and sex was considered an art and was given an exalted status through the medium of sculptural work in temples. Instead, as we approach the beginning of Christian civilization, sexual acts were considered immoral, debasing, inglorious, dirty and sinful.⁵⁷ In theory, the sexual mores of the first-century Greco-Roman world were in various aspects more liberal those of many 21st century Christians.

New Testament Perspective on Sex and Sexuality

If anyone thinks that Christians regard unchastity as the supreme vice, he is quite wrong. The sins of the flesh are bad, but they are the least bad of all sins. All the worst pleasures are purely spiritual: the pleasure of putting other people in the wrong, of bossing and patronizing and spoiling sport, and backbiting; the pleasures of power, of hatred . . . That is why a cold, self-righteous prig who goes regularly to church may be far nearer to hell than a prostitute. But, of course, it is better to be neither.⁵⁸

As the New Testament gives more attention to premarital sex, let us examine the sexual ethic with a view for consideration to construct an objective sexual morality for premarital relationships. Within this ethical framework, let us discuss Paul's sexual ethics in 1 Corinthians 7:1-9. Paul's letter to the community of faith believers in Corinth was to correct false teachings, practices and to provide instructions, concerning Godly living among the new believers in Christ. In fact, the culture of Corinth somewhat relates to the

⁵⁶ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: The Care of the Self*, vol. 3 (New York: Vintage Books), 230.

⁵⁷ John H. Brooke and Ronald L. Numbers, eds., *Science and Religion around the World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 71.

⁵⁸ C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996), 94-95.

American contemporary culture of conformity in a sex-saturated society. Not very different from our culture today, the people in Corinth possessed different types of spiritual gifts and abilities (1 Cor. 1:4-7, 12-13), yet they were spiritually immature (3:1-4). A good example is that a member from the Church of Corinth began to boast how he was sleeping with his stepmother, and other Church members were fascinated by his moral behaviour. By addressing the man's behaviour, Paul concluded his thoughts and made it clear that "by way of concession, not of command," (vs. 6), but as he wished everyone was as he, (assumable unmarried/single), but the reality is, everyone has their own gift from God and declared that both marriage and singleness are gifts given by God (7:7).

With reference to the "gift" of celibacy in (1 Cor. 7:7), a majority of Christians including myself, often grapple to understand what exactly is this gift Paul is referring to in Corinth. Further, Paul raises two significant questions regarding the gift of marriage and the gift of celibacy or (singleness) saying, how does a person know which gift is divinely selected for them? The Greek word for "gift" is (χρητισμα) and (*charisma*) in English which means a divine gratuity, which is deliverance from danger or passion, which is also a spiritual endowment of a free gift from God.⁵⁹ Therefore, the gift that Paul refers to is independent of our human responses, as he alluded "to be content in whatever circumstances I am" (Phil. 4:11). From a hermeneutical standpoint, it would appear that God would have to deliver a person from sexual danger or passion, but in order to be delivered, one need to be content, which would be the determining factor for the gift of celibacy. In the same essence, contentment would also be the determining factor for

⁵⁹ Biblesoft, *New Exhaustive Strong's Numbers and Concordance with Expanded Greek-Hebrew Dictionary* (Seattle, WA: Biblesoft and International Bible Translators, 1994).

keeping the gift of marriage, for both gifts are from God, for every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights (James 1:17).

As Paul expresses his own call and commitment to celibacy by saying that celibacy is ideal for increasing one's capacity to serve in Christ's kingdom, it would seem that Paul is content based on his theology and from his social location. More interestingly, Paul also recognizes and acknowledges that the ability to live a celibate/single life is a unique gift from God, and the gift of celibacy is not for everyone. In theory, it would seem that only God can allow a person to be content to live a celibate life, then again one would need to have a special desire to accept the gift with contentment, which everyone does not have and might not be interested. While Paul's mysterious revelation of God's gift of celibacy is profound, it is also very ambiguous. He fails to explain how God distributes sexual expression of passion to each person; but further asserted that, if two people cannot exercise self-control, they should marry. For it is better to marry than to be aflame with passion (v 7-9). From this biblical perspective, the problem with Paul's sexual ethics is that (1) it would appear that humans who have a strong sexual passion and do not have self-control should marry, and (2) those that have a strong sexual passion and can exercise self-control, but might not be interested in the unique "gift" of celibacy is problematic for young adults. After all, God doesn't give gifts and take them back, and for these reasons Paul's sexual ethics and morality is very problematic and ambiguous in our 21st century.

Paul's concept of marriage seemed to be predicated upon sexual desires, which does not provide any moral guideline for modern day Christians. In truth, people lose sexual desire and passion throughout their life span, and if marriage is based solely upon

strong sexual passion and desires, the reduction of one spouse's sexual passion and desires could possibly lead the other spouse to extramarital sex or divorce. If marriage is based on sexual passion due to lack of self-control, morality cannot survive without being harnessed with love (faithfulness, commitment, integrity and trust) for God and one another. As marital status falls under God's sovereignty by means of grace, based on one's state of contentment, premarital sex should not only be viewed morally acceptable within the context of marriage, but also in non-marital committed loving relationships that is not solely dependent upon strong sexual desire and passion. In this respect, one must understand that Paul's theological analysis of sexual desire is a product of his time; and his solution to sexual immorality is unique from his social location and contextual situation.

This lack of biblical clarity has led many single people in the millennial generation to develop their own Christian sexual ethic that allows for sex between consenting and committed partners outside of marriage. As for the Apostle Paul, his moral teachings are rooted in the commandment to love your neighbor as yourself, but that was not clearly articulated in his teachings on sexual immorality. In addition, a strong case can be made here that Jesus did not directly discuss sexual activity and that was not because he was bashful or prudish. Jesus only made four direct comments that are considered sexual in nature, concerning (1) divorce: Matt.5:31-32; 19:9, Mk. 10:11-12, Luk. 16:18; (2) lust: Matt. 5:27-28; (3) conversation with the Samaritan Woman: John 4:16-18; and (4) the woman caught in adultery: John 8:1-11. Most prophetic, was the woman who was caught in the act of adultery. One can only imagine how, frightened, fearful, shameful, and alienated she felt knowing she could have been stoned to death just

for sex. But most graciously, Jesus our Savior showed her love, compassion, grace, mercy and forgiveness that can only lead one to live a life for Christ.

God's greatest commandment is to love God and our neighbor, because humanity was all created out of God's love as relational and sexual beings, made in the image of God. As humans, God created each person not only as individuals, but also as people who live in a variety of social/cultural communities and contexts. In response to God's love, humans seek life-giving relationships with others and should create social structures and practices that support such relationships regardless of sexual orientation. God blesses His creatures continually with diverse powers, to use in living out those relationships: not to judge, shame, oppress and hold others in captivity. Rather, these powers are for actions, such as justice, human dignity, reasoning, imagination, and creativity. Sex and sexuality are God's good gifts to humanity, but our human, sinful nature often permeates and destroys God's good gift of sex throughout our human lives. The longing for companionship regardless of sexual beings, can cause indescribable pain, isolation, and even death.

The desire for sexual love does not by itself constitute a moral justification for exploitation, promiscuous and unselfish sexual behaviors. Giving and receiving love always involves mixed motives and limited understanding of individual and communal consequences. Even if one never has sexual intimacy, people all yearn and seek the need to be in relationships with others. Sexual love—erotic attraction immersed in love, faithfulness and trust—is a mysterious yet wondrous gift beyond our human finite knowledge. Therefore, I invite you to partake in this discourse to develop a practical, relevant responsible sexual morality that is based on both what we have come to learn

from science, experience, and reasoning with the revelations of the gospel message in time and space.

21st Century Church Perspective on Sex and Sexuality

Churches today have become experts at speaking around the subject of sex, rather than dealing with it directly, while young adults in our faith communities are silently wrestling with sexual issues, and not knowing where to go for help. In reality, the church believes that issues/concerns relative to sex should be discussed and resolved, but only in confidentiality—in a private setting with a pastor, counselor, or family—as opposed to open conversations, workshops or seminars. When the topic of sex and sexuality is brought up, there is usually a swift reactive and authoritarian response that sounds something like, “Don’t do that,” it is “wrong” or “bad” or “only for people who are married.”

Julian Huxley, an English evolutionary biologist stated that the child who begins to ask awkward questions and displays its perfectly natural curiosities on all other matters related to sex, is for the most part, simply told not to, and in a shocked voice. The distinction Huxley makes between one’s natural desires of curiosity and being repressed by authority is due to our distorted ideologies of right and wrong.⁶⁰ This negative reactive response only perpetuates the cycle of what people have been taught historically from a biblical and philosophical standpoint. With this approach, we subconsciously teach young adults to repeat the generational cycle we have learned, without any consideration of what they are undergoing with their God-given gift of sex and human sexuality. More

⁶⁰ Julian Huxley, *Religion without Revelation* (New York: New American Library, 1957), 119.

than that, our young adults become stigmatized with feelings of shame, guilt that only leads them to find other sources to satisfy their curiosity.

CHAPTER 5
SEX AND SEXUALITY:
RELIGIOUS AND CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

21st Century Religious/Christian Education Perspective

Today religious/Christian education is facing dramatic challenges, on topics of sex and sexuality due to postmodernism. Many Church educators and leaders are confused about the philosophy and the purpose of sexuality education in a religious education setting. Christian educator and mentor Robert Pazmino defines Christian education as deliberate, systematic, sustained, divine human efforts to collaboratively share and appropriate human knowledge, values, attitudes, skills, sensibilities, and behaviours, all consistent with the Christian faith. Fundamental to Pazmino's philosophy is his pedagogical aim that fosters change, renewal, and reformation of persons, groups, and structures, by the power of the Holy Spirit to reveal God's will as expressed in Scriptures and the person of Jesus Christ. He strongly argues that all evangelical theological educators must embrace a Christian epistemology, but must also attempt to see knowledge first, through the lens of the Bible.⁶¹

Theorist Thomas Groome recognized that Christian education is very complex, and asserted that it is the political activity with pilgrims that deliberately and intentionally attends to others, in the activity of God in present time, relative to the stories of the faith community. In other terms, when Groome refers to the word political, most generally, people equate the word with governmental political structures, but in theory, the word

⁶¹ Robert W. Pazmino. *Foundational Issues in Christian Education*, 2d ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books 1997), 87, 182, 255-285.

comes from the Greek word *polis*, which means city and refers to human social interactions as citizens.

In using the term, Groome is highlighting the social nature of our Christian education. So, when he uses words such as deliberately and intentionally, he is raising a critical consciousness, such as sex and sexuality, which is an aspect of Christian education.⁶² Likewise, religious/Christian leaders and educators must be deliberate with careful thoughts and intentionality to educate their communities on sex and human sexuality. By contrast, the methods or approach that a majority of religious/Christian leaders and educators take in addressing sex and sexuality in the church and society should be discussed at the outset. In many instances, when the topic of sex and sexuality surfaces, it is generally viewed in pessimistic terms, and the conclusion that numerous young adults or even grown-ups draw from their faith communities is that sex and sexuality is somewhat sinful and ungodly. It was extremely troubling when the focus group participants communicated that numerous pastors, ministers, educators and priests are not scripturally and theologically prepared, socially/culturally educated and informed to talk and teach about sex and human sexuality with credibility, comprehension and precise relevant biblical understandings and without shame and judgment.

As a religious educator and chaplain who has worked with peers and different religious affiliations, I have also observed the negative comments, as opposed to portraying sex and sexuality as a blessed gift from God the Creator. From a religious/Christian education viewpoint, this negative attitude becomes unavoidable and sends the wrong message to people who are struggling with their sexuality and families

⁶² Thomas Groome, *Christian Religious Education: Sharing Our Story and Vision* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1980), 25.

who need to have Godly “sex talk” discussions with their children and even spouses. In addition, it was in our focus group discussions, when we became aware that a vast population of young adults does not have a basic understanding of sex and sexuality, from a biblical and spiritual perspective. Most often this lack of biblical knowledge among young adults, has frequently questioned the purpose and relevance of Christian education.

Gabriel Moran, an American scholar and teacher of Christian theology and religious education, offers clarity through challenge, hope and newness of the mind. Moran was influenced by to Plato, Aristotle, Thomas Aquinas and other philosophers. These philosophers helped him to recognize the need for clarity and orderly expression of ideas, specifically tools of language to develop a sense of richness and value what Christian educators can draw upon, as a transformative revelation in the shift of post-modernity. Moran’s teaching methodology reflects an artful master teacher who gets excited thinking, learning to teach and showing people of faith how to do something new through challenging times.⁶³ As religious/Christian educators we need to be enthusiastic and excited to teach and share knowledge with young adults in our church and communities, and emphasize the presence and mystery of God in different conceptual ways, with emphasis on human experiences and the importance of analyzing the Church’s teachings in historical context.

By means of grace, religious/Christian education must respond appropriately to the moral issues adolescents and young adults are facing in our communities. The fact is each new challenge that arises in our culture always poses questions and requires

⁶³ Gabriel G. Moran, *Religious Education As a Second Language* (Birmingham, AL: Religious Education Press 1989), 79.

interactive, on-going dialogue within our religious/faith communities. When religious/faith leaders chooses to ignore, judge and condemn questions or lifestyles that are untraditional or unfamiliar to their church's traditional standpoint, then the church becomes stumbling blocks (1 Cor. 8:9; Rom. 14:13) in the lives of those who seek understanding and guidance on sexual matters.

The Prophetic Essence of Language

Another challenge facing religious/Christian education today is the prophetic essence of language. For centuries, the church has been dominated by traditional conservative voices that echo negative language surrounding sex and sexuality, and other important issues of sexual justice. For religious/Christian leaders to offer an effective teaching approach, it must present the right language, theologically/biblically informed, logically and scientifically grounded, which reflects various understanding of how the Christian faith embraces sex and sexuality. Brueggemann's fascinating discussion entitled "The Legitimacy of a Sectarian Hermeneutic: 2 Kings 18-19," makes a prophetic observation about the conversational essence of language. Brueggemann emphasizes that people of faith must engage in the world they live in. In order to do that, Christians must be able to engage in dialogue with those within and outside their faith traditions; to negotiate or build a bridge for a more dialogical communal language for processing what to do on sexual matters; all while talking to God behind the wall to get an answer. While this prophetic conversation behind the wall is crucial, he argues that the conversational language behind the wall is the decisive language,⁶⁴ which must produce a definite result. To engage in a critical prophetic conversation on sexual matters with young adults,

⁶⁴ Walter Brueggemann, "The Legitimacy of a Sectarian Hermeneutic: 2 Kings 18-19," in *Education for Citizenship and Discipleship*, ed. Mary C. Boys, 1-42 (New York: Pilgrim Press, 1989), 3.

religious/faith leaders must be able to speak and understand sex and sexuality through many theological lenses.

In this process, religious/faith leaders must be able to translate the language of sex and sexuality to implement models and teaching methodologies that reflect the changing cultural shifts in our society and culture. Therefore, religious/Christian education needs to bring the language of sex and sexuality to the wall and speak about the topics in an intelligible, persuasive, and constructive manner. Ultimately, the essence of the prophetic language behind the wall must also be concerned with young adult's own identity and faith tradition as it relates to sex and sexuality. By articulating this concept as a biblical rationale for including sex education as part of the evangelical mission, Pazmino also argues that an evangelical theology of education must be based on biblical authority, because the necessity of dialogical conservation is the redemptive work of Jesus Christ. The pedagogical aim here is to motivate and encourage young adults and previous generational cohorts to cross over into post-modernity.⁶⁵ This act of faith is for the common good of God's people, to bridge the mind set of Christians in terms of sex and sexuality within the context of the Church. Consequently, the prophetic essence of language and dialogue are indispensable, because they both can assist young adults and faith communities in the process of learning and knowing, as opposed to being regarded as strategy to involve others in a particular task. This awareness is relevant for the Church's religious/Christian educators, in our postmodern society, where technology and information is so prevalent, to mobilize the community of faith believers from a state of

⁶⁵ Mary C. Boys, ed., *Education for Citizenship and Discipleship* (New York: Pilgrim Press, 1989), Chap. 6.

victimization to a state of moral agency. As history changes, the Church's attitudes and beliefs must embrace new thought process for new generations.⁶⁶

Young Adults: Underrepresented in the Church

David Kinnaman, president of the Barna Research Group contends in *You Lost Me: Why Young Christians are Leaving Church and Rethinking Faith* that a huge population of young adults today is not taking an interest in church, since they see the congregation as incapable of demonstrating the relevance between the good news of Jesus Christ and their daily lives.⁶⁷ Most of all, in support of our study Kinnaman draws our attention and states the facts that over one-third of youthful Christians (36 percent) presently say that they don't feel comfortable to ask the most personal inquiries such as sex related matters in places of worship. He injected that, by difference, while science appears to welcome skepticism, dialog, hypothesis, and shared learning, church creates an environment where questions and concerns are chastised and rejected. More so, he attested that the American church has for some time been seen as a being pedantic with respect to God's outline for sex and human sexuality, and in the meantime, our common world has no appreciation for sex.⁶⁸ I admire Kinnaman for being frank concerning the negative attitudes a majority of our churches have relating to sex, as our focus group participants are of the same opinions.

Correspondingly, author Gabe Lyons in his book titled *UnChristian: What a New Generation Really Thinks About Christianity* contended that it is vital for faith

⁶⁶ Ibid., 262.

⁶⁷ David Kinnaman, *You Lost Me: Why Young Christians are Leaving Church and Rethinking Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2011), 117, 149.

⁶⁸ Ibid, 52.

community leaders to note that this era of young adults is open, as well as profoundly straightforward, and any powerlessness to express their credible emotions and assessments is totally opposite to their straightforward nature, which is also evident in the study focus group discussions. Lyons further expressed that interpersonal interaction for young adults, is about living in perspective and being extremely vocal.⁶⁹ The statements about how vocal the young adults were are in agreement with our discussion sessions.

Most recently, the Religious Institute, a liberal institution that promotes comprehension of sex and human sexuality, took note of reports that revealed the indignity of traditionalist ministers' lecture against homosexuality and premarital sex. They called for more comprehensive "sex talk" in the pulpit, specifically directed at liberal pastors who adhere to a progressive understanding of sex and human sexuality.⁷⁰ In the same manner, based on our study, we have also observed that religious/faith leaders and educators are not necessarily knowledgeable, while others grudgingly resist assistance to gain a broader understanding of sex and human sexuality. Most essentially, I firmly agree and support efforts for "sex talk" and hope our research study will initiate a conscious critical awareness for families, religious leaders/educators, on sex related issues.

The inability to engage in dialogue about sex is not limited to conservative churches. In a survey of liberal, Protestant clergy, the Religious Institute reported over 70% of clergy responded that they discussed sexuality the congregants and 90% of

⁶⁹ Gabe Lyons, *UnChristian: What a New Generation Really Thinks About Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 33.

⁷⁰ Jeanne Carstensen, "New Report: More Sex in the Pulpit," *Religion Dispatches*, February 10, 2010, <http://religiondispatches.org/new-report-more-sex-in-the-pulpit>.

seminaries do not require a course in sexuality.⁷¹ The results of our study show that a range of religious/faith leaders and educators are not necessarily knowledgeable about sexuality, while others grudgingly resist assistance to gain a broader understanding of sex and human sexuality. These results reinforce the need to support efforts for “sex talk,” and strengthen our hope that this research study will initiate a conscious critical awareness for families, religious leaders/educators on sex related issues, to reason biblically and logically for human dignity and integrity for the moral good of individuals and the church’s commandment and allegiance to love God and neighbor.

⁷¹ Ibid.

CHAPTER 6 LEADERSHIP IN MINISTRY

Servant Leadership

With reference to our discussion on religious/Christian education, I believe it is imperative to talk about leadership in ministry. As a Prophetic Single Adults Ministry Leader and a Doctor of Ministry candidate, I strongly believe in order to have a purposeful, and fruitful ministry, it is important to understand the core essence of leadership. Characteristically, what I have come to understand in leadership development is that there is no single definition or philosophy for leadership. My personal philosophy of leadership is best summed up by Robert R. K. Greenleaf: “It begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve first. Then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead.”⁷²

Greenleaf further summarizes servant leader as “the difference manifests itself in the care taken by the servant-first to make sure that other people’s highest priority needs are being served.”⁷³ In the true essence of leadership, growth transformation is my ultimate goal within ministry. Therefore, I intentionally strive to address the needs/issues of each single adult within my ministry, to ensure their highest priority needs are taken into consideration for the well-being, growth, and transformation demonstrated in this research project.

⁷² Robert R. K. Greenleaf, *The Servant as Leader*, 4th ed. (New York: Paulist Press, 1970), 6.

⁷³ Ibid., 13.

The phrase “Servant Leader” initially appears to be a paradox. When we think of a servant, one envisions someone serving others. Likewise, we all perceive a leader as the one who is influential, powerful and has authority. The seeming contradiction of the words serves as a prophetic concept to emphasize the core essence of Jesus’ and Paul’s leadership model, as it is depicted in the Old Testament, where the Prophet Isaiah presents us with an ideal picture of a suffering Servant’s call to a prophetic ministry (Isaiah 52:13-53:12). The Servant is not identified in Isaiah’s prophecy, but our Lord’s suffering corresponds with the imagery he drew.

Without a doubt, it was Christ who suffered and took humanity’s sins upon himself, and made full atonement for all God’s creation. From this lens, in my finite state, I strive to demonstrate the Servant sacrificial love God has for humanity, and have come to the realization that in doing ministry it will cost something. Yet even in one’s most fragile state, God has given Christians this glorious treasure, which is God’s words and ministry. This would appear to be another paradoxical mystery, to think that God would commission, and entrust even me to carry on the work of God’s mission and ministry. But as Christ reminds us, it is by God’s mercy that we are engaged in this call to ministry and we should not lose heart, for we do not proclaim ourselves; but we proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord. (2 Corinthians 4:1, 5-10). This proclamation is through the power of the Spirit, as Paul admits that, we are afflicted in every way, perplexed, persecuted struck down, but not crushed, not destroyed, nor driven to despair, yet God chooses the broken “Clay Jars” to carry the treasure which is God’s Word and message of love and compassion.

In theory, the term servant leader is a model that reflects trust, self-giving, communication, integrity, sacrifice, humiliation, selflessness and the ethical use of power. The servant leadership model by its own nature has traits as well as learned skills, which can only be developed over a life-long process of learning and doing. In truth, servant leadership is a paradoxical concept for us today, for we live in a world that somewhat operates and perceives leadership as power, control, and authority over others. As such, every institution (religious or secular) today is fascinated with the theories, ideologies and myths that are associated with leadership.

From a Christian perspective, most of us are familiar with Jesus' theory on servant leadership as He proclaimed: "Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all" (Mark 10: 43-44). Jesus did not just talk the talk, but became a humble servant to his beloved disciples, by washing their feet even in the midst of betrayal (John 13:1-17). This is a very prophetic understanding of a servant leader, a very difficult concept to understand, and a harder one to follow, because in all honesty, most of us want to become great leaders without becoming great slave to others. As a result, I have observed that too often in ministry, leaders have a tendency to assimilate to our society and cultural trends on leadership theories, ideologies and myths, which gives a sense of false authority, control and power over those God entrusts them to serve. In truth, Jesus has set the example and has exhibited the essence of servant leadership throughout His ministry. This is the core foundational standard I strive to establish and develop within my ministry. Unfortunately, based on my experience within most churches, it would appear that leaders would rather

choose to follow cheap justice, power, authority, and control, as opposed to the path of sacrifice and humiliation for the sake of others.

Transformational Leadership in Ministry

In truth, Jesus washed his disciple's feet without giving up his role and authority as their Lord and Savior. This paradoxical example demonstrates the essence to lead with authority while serving others. There is also a correlation with servant leadership and transformational leadership, which is very evident throughout Scriptures. Jesus transformed the personal values of regular marginalized people to support his mission and ministry (Mt. 4:18-22). He also broke down racial barriers, by having a conversation with the Samaritan Woman at the well, who became the first woman evangelist in the gospels (John 4:9-26). Jesus has inspired and transformed His followers to go and spread the "Good News" of the gospel message (Matt. 28: 16-20).

We can all learn from Paul's servant and transformative leadership examples. Paul empowered, mobilized and transformed others by delegating the public readings of his letters to others (Col. 4:16), allowing others to arrange the collection of aids (1Cor. 16:3), and communicating effectively so that others can go on errands (1Cor. 4:17). Unquestionably, Paul was an exceptional servant and transformational leader who continued the ministry of Christ, while he motivated and empowered those who were immature, timid, challenged and marginalized to live changed lives for Christ (Col. 4:10; Phile. 1:24; 2 Tim. 4:11). In the same sense, Paul was unrelenting to be worthy of his calling, to the point where he addressed ethical and moral issues in Corinth (1Cor. 7). For Paul, the ultimate passion was not for his own gain and recognition, for it was he who said, "For me, to live is Christ and to die is gain" (Phil 1:21).

Spiritual Leadership in Ministry

As religious/Christian leaders, it is essential to model Jesus' and Paul's leadership styles, but in reality it can be challenging at times to emulate a spiritual leader. This is more a distinction rather than a criticism, which can make leaders reflect realistically on spiritual leadership. As the author of this demonstration project, I had a personal experience as the moderator during the research focus groups discussions/interviews. On many occasions after our group sessions/interviews I had to grapple with my own past failures and inabilities as a spiritual leader in my ministerial context at (LPC), and how I have failed to provide spiritual guidance for many young adults participants that I have taught in Sunday church for the past five years. During a personal interview conversation I conducted, one participant asked me, "how do I break spiritual ties" and embarrassingly showed me her arms all sliced up from shoulder to fingers that left me with deep feelings of sadness and compassion for the spiritual well-being of this participant. What is even more disturbing is that leaders in the majority of churches today are obviously not aware of the struggles that most young adults are facing in their place of worship, and how desperately they are in need of spiritual guidance. This experience also made me questioned my own overall leadership competencies and what kind of leader do I aspire to be, and have asked myself, "Do I have what it takes to achieve these qualities?"

This critical consciousness reminded me that God does not call the equipped, but God does equips those He calls into ministry (Heb. 13:21), and His grace is sufficient. Despite one's failure God will use broken vessels to do extraordinary work for the building of His kingdom, to show that the surpassing power belong to God and not to humans (2 Cor. 4:7). Indeed, one becomes stronger when one is weak by the power of

Christ (2 Cor. 12:9-10), which should encourage leaders to work earnestly modeling Christ Jesus, who will work in one's life in the most incredible and unimaginable ways.

Young adults today in the Church ask: "What is spirituality?" What I have come to understand from other literature is that historically, the Church has always offered a practice known as "spiritual direction" to bring awareness of God's presence in one's life, as well as to nurture the spiritual growth and formation in one's life. The Church (clergy or laity) is the one whom congregants (young adults) engage in dialogue, to seek spiritual guidance.⁷⁴ In the process, the pastor or minister usually offers suggestions and methods for helping individuals to understand God's presence in their lives regardless of their social location or starting point.

Similarly, in 1 Cor. 3:21 the Apostle Paul distinguishes the difference between the two types of spiritual levels: (1) beginners in the faith *nepioi* are to be fed only with milk and (2) those who are more mature *teleioi* are to receive solid food. In many of our churches today, this spiritual formation process has become obsolete, especially in the context of sex and human sexuality. In my ministry, I have often encountered situations where theologically trained leaders make the assumption that Christian, young adults should understand that sex is for marriage only, and that no other conversation about sex outside of marriage will be tolerated in God's church. This kind of spiritual leadership behavior within our faith communities only discourages and disparages our young adults from being a part of the church. As a result, they become highly influenced by popular culture that sends the wrong message of God's good gift of sex and human sexuality.

⁷⁴ Howard W. Stone and James O. Duke, *How to Think Theologically* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2003), 116.

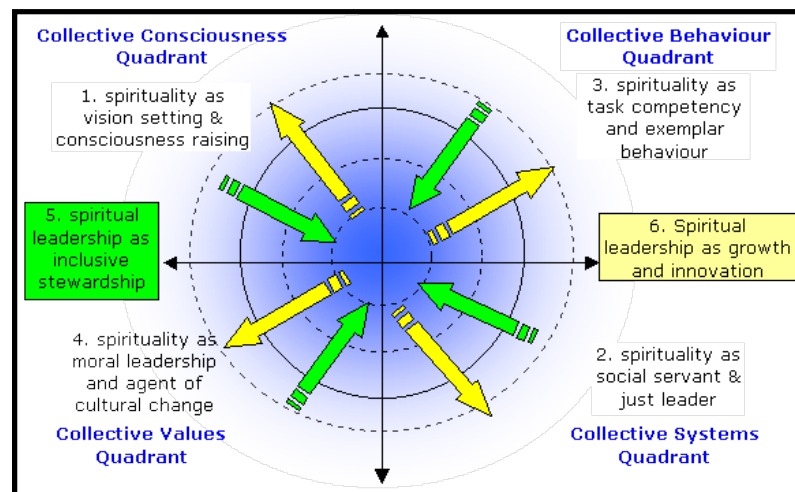
This experience can be very frustrating for the Christian young adults' spiritual growth formation based on what I have experienced among the focus group participants. As an example, in the context of my previous Single Adults Ministry (which was not based in a church), most of our group Bible discussions and lessons were based on relevance, interest, and real human life situations that reflected each individual's needs and concerns. This type of spiritual leadership approach gave many single adults the courage to share their personal experiences because there was a sense of trust, respect, belonging, acceptance, and love that enabled them to grow spiritually from their social location. Nevertheless, this approach can become challenging in most of our institutionalized churches because of their systematic hierarchic catechism.

On the contrary, catechism in the New Testament is a fundamental form of teaching and dialogue about God's people, His Word and law. In the gospel of (Luke 2:46, 47), we find Jesus engaging in a dialogue among doctors in the temple. This informs us that the essence of catechism has always entailed the engaged interactions and dialogues among teacher/leader and student. Jesus the greatest teacher used this form of question and answer with his disciples, to give spiritual guidance (Matt. 16:13-20). Even Paul refers to the catechism instruction related to the law in (Rom. 2:18) because the Jews who have been catechized out of God's law, did not spiritually appropriate what the law stated about the knowledge of sin.

Churches and religious/Christian educators need to refocus their mission by creating or integrating a pedagogical approach into the process of spiritual formation to bridge between biblical, theological reflection and relevant day-to-day cultural experiences, to engage and invest in the lives of our young adults. Spiritual growth

formation and development is also an important key aspect in the life of the Church that should seek human justice for all in our permissive sex culture today. A more integrated five basic conceptual approach that I have used in previous ministerial position and intend to incorporate in my personal Prophetic Single Adults Ministry for 21st century is illustrated in figure 5.

Figure 5 An Integrated Model of Spirituality in Leadership



This integrated model of spirituality in leadership, illustrates the true essence of spiritual leadership. A spiritual leader strives to integrate different elements of motivational guidance for the community of faith within the structures of the Church curriculum, as well as within their community. This inclusive and participatory effort exemplifies the ethical and moral depth that spiritual leaders should possess. Also, spiritual leaders do not ignore and devalue moral and ethical issues relating to sex and human sexuality, but rather develop or integrate a pedagogical aim to address the social concerns within their faith communities. These theological reflections and conscious awareness suggest the Church's need to be intentional in understanding this growing population of young adults.

I realize that everyone does not have spiritual gifts in addressing sexual matters in our churches. Nevertheless, it is of vital importance for faith communities to make an effort to understand and establish a relationship with our young people. This intentional effort can only be experienced through acts of God's *agape* love, compassion, moral and ethical justice. As religious and Christian educators, our relationship with others and God are fundamental, which becomes our source for moral and spiritual guidance among the community of faith believers. As leaders, it is time to realize that young adults' challenges and barriers are not different from our own challenges, including the challenges and barriers of God's people in Scriptures. Most of our young adults are products of their cultural and generational/parental upbringing, including the silence of the church on sexual matters. These embedded beliefs and behaviors have deeply shaped and distorted their spiritual growth formation and theological views on life. Most prophetically, they are seeking to make sense of who they are in the 21st century, with acceptance, while seeking spiritual direction within their faith communities, regardless of their sexual orientation, which in fact is an obstacle and challenge that the Church needs to accept. Remember this can be a very critical turning point in our young adult's life that must be approached through prayers, and by theologically trained spiritual leaders who have a passion and commitment for young adults in the 21st century.

CHAPTER 7 IMPLEMENTING THE PLAN

It was over the summer between late May to early July of 2015, by the grace of God, that I was able to establish a sample focus group to begin the “Sex Table Talk Forum” discussion on sex and human sexuality in the context of premarital sex among Christian, college-age, young adults from the Linden Presbyterian Church (LPC), Linden, NJ and surrounding communities. Since the topic of sex and human sexuality in the context of premarital sex has been a controversial topic historically— which is so paradoxical in our sex saturated society and culture today—I had to pray and seek God’s guidance on how to strategically craft my research in order to get the support I need in the process. As led by the Holy Spirit and as consciously aware, I developed two preaching series as a biblical, theological and hermeneutical understanding of “The Great Commission” (Matthew 28: 18-20): Part I to establish my authority, call and passion to ministry, which is not a “great suggestion,” but rather, a command from our Lord to all Christians to put their faith in action, to share the “good news” of the gospel message; and Part II, more profoundly, because of what Christ has done for us on the Cross.

I urged the congregation to take the “Great Commission” faith challenge. As a teaching example, I demonstrated, as one called by God, my mission and purpose to minister to the young single adults in our church and surrounding communities who seek biblical/theological understanding, guidance and affirmation regarding their God given human sexuality, to inform healthy choices in sexual behaviors.

The Great Commission

The purpose and thrust of the preaching series on the “Great Commission” was to establish my call to ministry and as a critical consciousness among the LPC members. The critical awareness of “The Great Commission” often reminds us that we are all called and have an obligation to fulfill our call to ministry, even though one might be called to go against the traditional beliefs of their church. In theory, the “Great Commission” is the last recorded personal instruction given by Jesus to His disciples, commanding them, regardless of their social location, church membership and measure of faith, that they must go and make other disciples (Matthew 28: 18-20). What really inspired me and captured my attention was the order and process in which Jesus instructed his disciples to make disciples of others. First, he told his disciples that all authority has been given to him in heaven and earth. In other words; if anyone questions Jesus’ disciples regarding their mission and call to ministry, we should tell them that the Scriptures affirms and assures us that we are all given the permission and authority to fulfill the Great Commission.

Jesus said, “go” and proclaim the good news to the world. The word “go” refers to evangelism, which is the essential work of religious/faith leaders within their communities. It is not an option for Christians, but an obligation directed from Christ, to call Christians to make disciples of others. I also believe we should always be reminded that there are no exceptions in God’s Kingdom, because two thousand years ago Jews, Gentiles, Samaritans, men, women, children, prostitutes, tax collectors, and Roman Centurions were all appropriate subjects for evangelistic efforts. The Kingdom of God is inclusive, not exclusive. Our mission is to embrace those of different sexual orientation,

the sexually unmarried, spiritually hungry, lost and hurting; and not necessarily those who appear to be holy gods.

This preaching awareness series afforded me the opportunity to coordinate the first “Domestic Violence Awareness” service held at LPC, which involved the participation of youth, young single adults, and the elderly. This event afforded me the opportunity not only to talk about sex and sexuality from the pulpit, but also to engage the congregation in unison and responsive liturgies. Additionally, the worship service was preceded by a special Fellowship Time with a Discussion Panel of sharing, encouragement, comfort, and healing in observance of “Domestic Violence Awareness.”

The discussion panel consisted of:

- Guest Speakers Lieutenant Bara and Sergeant Struszczyk (Linden, NJ Police Department)
- Dr. William C. Weaver (LPC Pastor, Site Team Member, Former Chaplain Linden Police Department, Robert Wood Johnson University Hospital Rahway, NJ)
- Oke Obasi (LPC Elder)-What men can do to stop DV
- Margarita Estrada (LPC member) -The silence of women who are married to ministers/pastors
- Christine Chiobi, Chelsea Yeats, Amanda Benshoff (LPC college young adults)-perspectives on teens and young adults healthy relationships
- Mmaezi Chiobi (LPC member)- Shares experience working with DV victims & important information we should know
- Janice Acheson (LPC Session/Site Team member)-Getting the message across to our Church school adolescents

Predicting a positive and receptive outcome to the events, I naively assumed that the next phase in educating and equipping the ministerial/lay leadership and site team members who are comprised of the teaching committee at LPC on the issues of human sexuality and premarital sex among the young adults would be an easy task. To my surprise and disappointment, I had a challenging time moving to the next phase of my demonstration project. This experience allowed me to reflect deeply as to what might be

underlying issues in participation. After analyzing the situation I realized that (1) LPC is a small congregation and the ministerial leadership/lay members are also active representatives for a majority of committees within the Church, which often creates meeting conflicts, and (2) I strongly believe, church members shy away, or rather have a difficult time talking about issues relating to sex and human sexuality.

Therefore, my task and challenge was to be creative and get the site team members to engage in dialogue relative to sex and human sexuality. In the midst of this challenge, and in the process of researching my project, I came across the film “Let’s Talk about Sex,” that addresses the essence of the overall demonstration project. In the film, the director James Houston, an Australian fashion photographer, who currently resides in the United States, struggles to make sense of our contradicting and paradoxical attitudes about sex and sexuality, while in Australia teens, young adults and parents are open to talk about sex and accept the reality that young adults are sexually active. In the film Houston ventured to talk with the people that are most affected: teens, young adults and their families.⁷⁵

The film depicts how Americans live in a society that uses sex to sell everything from lipstick to laptops computers, yet the fear and silence around sex and sexuality permeates our culture. This profound critical conscious awareness reveals the American attitudes toward the importance of talking about sex and sexuality in a culture that has dominated negative education about sex, which has affected today’s teenagers, young adults and families.

⁷⁵ James Houston, “Let’s Talk about Sex,” film website, <http://www.letstalkaboutsexthefilm.com/about.html>, (accessed September 24, 2015).

I reviewed the film and requested that the ministerial/lay and site team leaders watch the film at their convenience and provide feedback, comments and suggestions, which I hoped would initiate dialogues about sex and human sexuality among young single adults in our church and communities. The pedagogical aim was to use the film as a platform, to initiate site team members to engage in controversial and uncomfortable dialogue about the facts and realities pertaining to sex and human sexuality. Most importantly, as conscious critical self-awareness another objective for the site team included: (a) reflection on their viewpoints (b) and their role at LPC (c) in contrast to LPC's standpoint and (d) its cultural attitudes towards sex and sexuality, and how these attitudes affect youth and young adults today.

Site-Team Discussion

Overall, the site-team members were very receptive and supportive, while others were more conservative. A majority of members thought the film was very informative and addressed the social-cultural shift in our society, and the church's position in addressing the moral issues among our emerging adults. On the other hand, they were not sure how comfortable they would be talking with their young adults about sex, much less giving them condoms or contraceptives. They all agreed that parents needed to take responsibility and not solely depend on pastors to resolve moral sexual issues that become a serious problem. One member expressed that most young adults come from broken homes, and it is difficult for those young people to know what a healthy relationship looks like. Another stated that once young adults go off to college it is difficult for the church to reach out to them. Heads nodded vigorously accompanied by quiet murmurings of yes, yes. "This is a problem," echoed across the room. Clearly most

participants agreed that there, in fact, was a problem that needed to be addressed; yet few substantive comments were made by anyone present. To be fair to the participants, the questions were thought-provoking and controversial and made people reflect. But the question remained: how can we talk openly and honestly about sex and sexuality, as it relates to our college-age, single, young adults, in light of our identity as Christians? Nevertheless, they were supportive of the “Sex Talk Table Forum” and were interested to implement the method as an outreach community initiative.

In the next phase I had initially planned to coordinate a “Community Meet & Greet” Up Close & Personal Togetherness to introduce the community outreach interactive dialogue “Sex Table Talk Forum” event, but due to the lack of church participant support and time constraints, the event did not take place as planned. In the interim, I made several announcements at LPC worship service during the month of May 2015, including the distribution of flyers within the community to advertise and inform those who are interested to be part of a focus group “Sex Table Talk Forum” (see Appendix B). More than that, we created a safe welcoming space during the “Fellowship Time” after worship at LPC, with refreshments for church family, friends and visitors who wanted more specific details about the upcoming “Sex Table Talk Forum.” This fellowship time provided a more personal approach and space to further explain the relevance and objectives of the “Sex Table Talk Forum” discussions, including potential focus group participants.

Another aspect of the implementation process was to identify and recruit a team to assist in the “Sex Table Talk Forum” focus group discussions. Because the demonstration project is a qualitative research design using a focus group participant

discussion methodology, I refrained from using a moderator during the sessions to protect the identity of the focus group participants, and the fact that a majority of the young adults who are members of LPC expressed not feeling comfortable with an independent moderator.

Upon recruiting participants for the focus group discussion by the late spring of 2015, I observed that there were three college-age, young adults within my church congregation, who had graduated from the regular Sunday church school curriculum program designed for children ages 4-17 years. As LPC does not have a continuum transitional program designed for high school graduates, I became very concerned for the young adults spiritual development and well-being and was moved with compassion to start a small group discussion to understand-some of the challenges they faced in their daily lives. From the small group discussions I discovered that they lacked moral guidance, and biblical understanding in a broader context pertaining to relationships. Based on this observation I asked if they would be interested in participating in a focus group discussion, which is a doctoral research study concerning single young adults who are seeking biblical/theological understanding, guidance and affirmation, regarding their God given gift of human sexuality, that will empower, liberate and inform healthy choices in sexual behaviors.

To my surprise, they were very excited and interested in the proposition, and so I explained the overview process of the research project, and suggested that they welcome their college friends within the community who might be interested in participating. Not long afterwards, the college-age, young adults invited their friends to join our Sunday

young adult group discussions on relationships, which gave me an opportunity to meet the group and establish a rapport prior to the initial focus group discussions.

Focus Group Demographics Population

The demographics of the sample focus group participants consisted of nine Christian, college-age, young adults. Out of the nine participants six are members of LPC and the other three participants were members of other churches within the Linden, NJ community. The demographic characteristics used for this population segment of young adults are: (a) two male and seven females; (b) age 18-26 years; (c) ethnicity African American/Caucasian; (d) who are single, single mother; (e) churched who has a Christian background and attend church regularly; (f) unchurched who has a Christian background, but are secular; (g) high school graduates completing college education; (h) are sexually active in a committed relationship; (i) one participant confidently identify self as bi-sexual; (j) others seemed open to same sex relationships. Participants were not randomly selected, and therefore do not represent all the Christian, college-age, young adult population. However, they do cover similar characteristics and social cultural perspectives, as well as different social locations.

Planning and Procedures

In the preparation process, the logistics were discussed among the site team members for the “Sex Table Talk Forum,” such as the type of equipment that will be used to code/interpret the data (tape recorder, video tape recorder). The equipment was recommended because I thought of creating a documentary demonstration project film as a part of my project oral presentation; as the researcher I was the only one conducting the discussion sessions due to sensitive nature of the discussions within the church setting;

and most importantly to protect participant's identity. Further, I had a conversation with my advisor, Dr. Mariah Britton, who suggested that I could use two independent reviewers for the coding and reviewing process, which we all agreed to do. We also discussed securing a safe private environment and dates and times at LPC for the focus group discussions, including refreshment and a monetary stipend for the participants. In addition, a set of three personal interviews was requested of participants of the focus groups conducted in June 2015. The day before the first kick-off "Table Talk Forum," I contacted the participants via text group message to confirm that we would be meeting at the location.

Finally, the first session took place at LPC on Sunday morning, May 31, 2015, at approximately 9:30 AM. The room was set-up nicely with a square table and chairs, so each participant was visible, the video camera was adjusted properly to capture the group at an angle, refreshments were situated on one side of the room, and later in the process the tape recorder was placed in the middle of the discussion table. Not long afterward, when everyone promptly arrived, I gave them a warm welcome, thanked them for coming, and directed them to the table where I had brunch prepared for them. The focus group participants mingled for a while and everyone seemed excited and delighted, yet somewhat anxious to get started. As we began the process, I introduced myself, and talked briefly about the demonstration project; in the same manner each participant introduced themselves to the group. I next reviewed the entire aspect of the informed consent letter and made sure each person understood the terms and conditions before signing. Thereafter, as a collective group effort, the participants helped to establish the ground rules to start the discussion. Fortunately, from my vantage point, I had an

opportunity to meet and establish a rapport with the focus group participants prior to our first kick-off session, so I opted to do the “Johari Window,” which is a team building exercise.

CHAPTER 8

FOCUS GROUP FINDINGS AND PERSONAL INTERVIEWS

As the demonstration project is a qualitative research study, we decided to use a Focus Group design to obtain a deeper and richer understanding of the college-age, young adults' attitudes, beliefs and perceptions of sex and human sexuality in the context of premarital sex. Additionally, we thought a focus group setting would reveal a wealth of detailed information and deep, profound insights, as well as reveal the various attitudes, expressions and body language when one talks about sexual matters. In the same manner the focus group discussions created a sense of belonging, acceptance, affirmation, and gave the young adults a safe place to express their voices and experiences from their social location, without judgment and shame. The discussions were conducted between late May and June 2015 at LPC. Virtually all volunteer participants were in some way acquainted with one another, two of the participants are in a committed sexual relationship, and others invited their best friend, while the other participant were close acquaintances.

The participants were given a written informed consent form to review and sign and were assured of the confidentiality of all that was said and transpired in the focus group discussion sessions. The discussions focused on sex and human sexuality in the context of premarital sex, among nine emerging college-aged, Christian, young adults from LPC and surrounding communities. Each focus group session discussion lasted 90-120 minutes, mainly because the young adults felt comfortable and wanted to share, as

well as to reflect on some of the responses and comments offered. As an ethical consideration, to protect and conceal the identity of the focus group participants, a decision was made among the research site-team members not to have a moderator during the discussion session. However, there were two non-affiliated-LPC independent moderators, including myself, who worked together to interpret and transcribe the data. We believe the information we collected was rich, insightful, reflective, challenging, emotional, yet transformative. We will present the focus group discussion in verbatim format, including comments, body language expressions and reactions during the focus group discussion, as well as an overall essence and the young adults' authenticity. Unless otherwise indicated, the themes reported below, emerged from the focus group discussion sessions.

Biblical Knowledge of Sex and Human Sexuality

Interestingly, the overall young adult participants demonstrated a low level of biblical knowledge as it relates to sex and human sexuality, even though they all consider themselves Christians, with 6 out of 9 participants active members of a church. One of the 6 participant described sex as, "what you do to make a baby," followed by giggling expressions from the group. When the focus group was asked to define human sexuality, 3 participants responded saying, "what sex you prefer;" "how people are attracted to each other;" and "how you feel about yourself." Another participant added that, "It's hard to explain because there's so many connotations attached to it." Similarly, the focus group participants were asked how you learned of sex and human sexuality. One participant said, "Adam and Eve;" another said "gender roles;" two participants mentioned celebrity transgender Bruce Jenner; and another reminded the focus group that Bruce Jenner 'Go

by she now!” A majority of participants stated that they first learned of sex by hearing other kids talking about it; some mentioned older siblings; sex education and film at school; describing how funny and stupid the experience was for them. Other participants mentioned social media, friends; the girls in the focus group said, “When we first got our period;” and a few vaguely said parents. Based on these responses, we wanted to get a better understanding and details of the “sex talk” conversations participants had with their parents.

Young Adults “Sex Talk” with Parents

In the discussions, focus group participants were asked to describe how their parents approached them with the “sex talk.” Although there were similarities and differences in the participant’s responses, a vast majority of them expressed that their parents would say, “if you have any questions ask me.” One participant responded by making a point that, “you see, they say come to us but they never really had the talk!”

The same participant further explained

But the way high school is with my friends and everything growing up with the Internet, it’s more like I’ve had to teach myself with everything about what there is to know, because I don’t want to be misinformed. I rather know on my own if my parents are not going to talk to me about it. My mom works at a church that is very religious, my dad less so, but he works all the time, he’s never home. Honestly at this point in time, there is no point in it, because I know what I need to know. I’ve been exposed enough to media and information; that I know how to properly conduct myself in these situations.

Another commented that, “at the same time it is already too late,” (meaning they have already engaged in premarital sex). Interestingly, one participant explained that

My parents are divorced so growing up I live with my mom I never have a talk with my dad ever. I don’t think he would even go there! So my mom give me the American Girl Body book and that kinda open it up and also like, we have a good relationship where like if I have any questions she

will answer it honestly, even if it's like weird. Luckily I have that openness with my mom. But she's like a little old fashion, I don't want to say her information is like, outdated, but it's different from our generation.

Another participant responded saying,

I didn't have that, I had a mom who we are like best friends, who would tell me things that I needed to know. But the conversation about sex came about what I got sick, (allergic to condom) and my mom found out!

Two other participants said the following:

From my perspective I grew up without a mother, so going to my father saying hey I now have a boyfriend and I'm actually having sex is awkward. So he didn't want to believe it upon till the day I told him while he was sitting on the toilet, hey dad I miss a period. So that's when he came to realization that I was doing it! I mean we were always very open about it but as a girl you wouldn't want to say I'm doing this, that the third, no not till after you have a kid. Then it's like a whole other thing, it's like yeah Dad, he did this, this and that nah. They don't want to hear that, but it's different when you only grow up with a father! Your whole thing opens after you have a kid, and everything comes out.

To interpret the last statement, the participant meant that a whole dialogue opens up about sex with parents when one has a child. There were lots of giggling in the room, and the group seemed to be enjoying the openness shared by this participant. Similarly, another participant added that, “

The thing is I ended up having the talk with my mom way after-the-fact. Like because like we've have been like communicating about that because I have two older sisters and my mom was always looking at me like you'd better not do anything! And I'm just like I'm just standing back over here, I know how to protect myself and stuff I'm not getting anyone pregnant! Nothing is ever so bad to the point where we didn't have the talk until she found a condom on my floor. It was just there; she was just like, what is this on your floor? I was just like yeah... As long as you're using condoms it's OK, as long as you're protecting yourself. I was just like ALL RIGHT mom!

From our observations, it was a sense of relief, affirmation, responsibility, and trust that was expressed from this participant, knowing that his mother, in her way had the sex talk with him.

One participant shared a different experience saying that, “I never really had the talk with my parents so I feel like, they’re really scary like saying there is STDs out there don’t do that, stay away from that,” including one participant who agreed with the statement saying

My parents are also like your parents, they’re a little bit more open to it, they know I have a boyfriend and they know what comes with boyfriend, but I never had the talk with them and I don’t think I will ever have it, because I’ll be the one to initiate it but I have an older sister so I’m not worried, but I can’t really imagine talking to my parents about it, I don’t think there’s anything to tell me that I don’t know, I don’t think I have anything to benefit from it, so I really don’t think I have any need to talk with them, but I just feel like without it I’m fine.

Premarital Sex, Adolescent Peer Pressure and Effects

Based on our discussions, the focus group participants revealed that they have engaged in premarital sex between the ages of 14-16, with the exception of one participant who experienced premarital sex at age 18. It is important to note that all focus group participants are raised in Christian families, with 4 out of 9 participants who have been actively involved in Church programs since their early childhood development years; while the other 5 participants attend a church occasionally. Reflecting on what the participants shared relative to the “sex talk” with their parents, we realized that a majority of the focus group had engaged in premarital sex during their adolescence years. In truth, this was a shocking reality, or more probably feelings of denial, yet disturbing.

Nonetheless, it was of vital importance for those in the focus group to share the nature surrounding their first sex experiences/encounters and the after effects during their adolescent sexual experiences. The participants all expressed that there was a lot of peer pressure to have sex in middle school through high school. One participant stated that, she lost her virginity to a friend in middle school, and said, “Oh my god that’s the worst

thing and it was very awkward.” Another participant added that “the older you get the more peer pressure, because if you’re a virgin you’re considered to be a prude and if you’re not you are a slut.” She also mentioned that in eighth grade someone said to her, “you guys dating for two weeks why not do it” (meaning have sex). The focus group was a bit surprised by the statements; they chuckled and said “eighth-grade!” The majority of the focus group participants agreed that early sexual activity is very common today among young adolescents. The focus group emphasized that early adolescent’s premarital sexual practices are due to the natural sex urges during puberty and hormones, peer pressure, manipulation of older adolescents, lack of parental guidance, the influence of social media, and older siblings’ sexual activity. A female participant sadly shared that she lost her virginity at age 14 to a boy she was involved with, and further described the physical and mental abuse of that relationship. Upon reflecting now as a young adult, she realized that the sexual relationship was unhealthy for her and had the courage to end it, and said her adolescent abusive relationship made her the person who she is today (meaning more mature and can articulate the difference between a healthy and unhealthy relationship).

Young Adults, Beliefs, Attitudes and Perceptions of Sex

As it pertains to premarital sex, all participants in our focus group discussion strongly expressed the acceptability that premarital sex is not a sin and the act is not wrong. The vast majority of young adult participants do recognize the consequences and risks associated with premarital sexual practices; but they do believe that if two people are involved in a committed consensual relationship and are using contraception and understand the risks involved, it’s ok to have sex. From the discussions it is apparent that

all participants seemed knowledgeable and aware of contraceptive methods of preventing pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases (STDs). However, one participant inferred that, “even though the doctor tells you about the consequences and risks if you do not have safe sex, it would also be beneficial if parents reinforce the consequences and risks with young adults.”

They strongly believe that young adults should be responsible if they decide to have sex. They frequently mention the use of condoms and the pill as an appropriate and responsible approach to engaging in sex. The participants often expressed that if one feels comfortable and thinks they are going to spend forever with their sex partner, then it is morally right to have sex. One participant explain that

I met my boyfriend who was 7 years older than me, and we love each other, so I didn't felt that it was something wrong or is a sin, because we were in a committed relationship and has been engaged for the past three years; and we have a child, and plan to be with each other for the rest of our lives, so for us it is not a sin, and we are not having sex just to have a kid, sorry Church Fathers!

At this point, the focus group was hysterically laughing and giggling about the statement of the participant. In addition, another participant commented that “I think it's what's right for you if you want to do it just do it; if you don't, then don't.” For it to be your decision it must be a conscious one. If that's who you love! Another participant also commented that, “if you feel comfortable with the person, and you feel safe doing that with them why not!” Upon hearing these responses, we viewed them as their acceptance and affirmation of premarital sex.

Moral Values

Participants were asked to describe their moral values, as it relates to what their sexual relationships are based upon. The responses were:

- Personally I want to feel that there is some future commitment down the road before I even think about having sex with someone.
- I want to feel like there is commitment, respect, loyalty, trust and I can be vulnerable and safe with this person
- I cannot see myself having a one night stand with someone

In order to understand what moral premise their decisions are based on, we asked, “At what point does sex becomes wrong or a sin?” One participant said “When you’re being promiscuous;” two other participants said, “when you’re unfaithful doing it outside of a relationship.” Very interestingly, one participant said, “sex is based upon what line, are you willing to draw, and if you regret the decision that you make that is a sin!”

Another participant added to that comment and stated that, “some people feel their sexual decision is a sin based on the fact that they’re being judged by other people, because they were fine with their decision before they were judged.” From a biblical perspective, we asked participants, “What do you think about the scripture in Genesis that says the two become one?” They appeared to be thrown off balance by the question and definitely unclear of how to respond. To clarify the question, the Scripture was read and explained to the focus group. Immediately, an outburst of laughter echoed in the room, and a majority of participants said, “I guess were all married to a lot of people,” based on their conceptual understanding of the Scripture. One participant had a different attitude and said,

Had I known that; I’m not saying it would change my decision about premarital sex! The fact is time has changed from my mom and dad’s perspective so knowing that, I don’t think it would’ve change my decision from having sex! Marrying and not having sex that sounds ridiculous. I have to do what I feel is right for me!

The other focus group participants all agreed with the comment that was made.

Cultural Influences: Social Media, and Friends with Benefits Culture

The issue being discussed is where one draws the sexual interaction line between hooking up (uncommitted, non-emotional casual sex) and encounters between friends. Indeed this is very confusing and complex to our sensibility, but when college-age, young adults talk about hooking up or friends with benefits they are referring to a complexity of rules to engage in uncommitted casual sexual encounters that seem to be a sub-culture norm in colleges/universities today. Essentially, the discussion about the influence of culture emerged from a participant who stated,

Most people say you shouldn't have sex before marriage, which is bad in a way, because it shame people who enjoys casual sex, because casual sex is a part of today's culture, and I feel that's not bad and it's not a sin.

One participant had a differing comment and said, "I believe friends with benefits is very toxic;" others agree, while some expressed different opinions, stating that it all depends whether or not both individuals are OK and agree to have that type of sexual relationship.

We wanted to know if the attitudes of focus group participants were influenced by culture and asked, "Which of the following (Church or Culture) have the most influence in your life." The entire focus group synchronized responses were "culture." To confirm their answers, I reiterated and ask the group how many of you are Christians? And they all responded that they were Christians. At this point, they were all laughing, but I was shocked or probably in a state of denial, expecting to hear the word "church" from any of the five participants who I have taught for the past in Sunday church school programs. To my disappointment, as a ministry leader, I felt I had failed to provide relative spiritual guidance in terms of the challenges they faces in their adulthood development. In order not to show my emotions, I braced myself and continued with the discussions. I made a

statement saying, “Is it fair to say that emerging young adults in our society today are highly influenced by culture, even if they were raised in a church with a good Christian values?” The focus group participants all agreed and said yes, one participant answered with “it’s almost like virtue versus nature.”

The reality and fact of the matter is, a majority of the participants believe that if two people decide to have casual sex and it’s a mutual and consensual agreement between them, and they both feel good about themselves, it is not a bad thing. This conceptual understanding opened the conversation to a deeper concept of “friends with benefits” from their perspective. By the focus group definition, “friends with benefits” is basically consensual, casual, premarital sex between two people who agree, with the understanding that there is no form of emotional attachment after the brief encounter. However, if a person begins feeling (meaning falling in love emotionally, or interested in a committed relationship), they would be judged by others for having sex with multiple people, which is considered “slut shaming.” Other examples of “slut shaming” are when guys beg girls to have sex with them, and when they do, the guys would post the information or nude picture on social media. Likewise girls taking nude pictures of themselves, sending it to their boyfriend or posting it on social media, is being judge by others as “slut shaming.”

There is a difference between guys and girls in these cases, and the difference is girls typically have a problem detaching themselves emotionally, while guys don’t have any emotional problems with detaching them self after a brief casual sex encounter. In the discussion, one participant made a point and added, “*that’s not true in all cases for guys because there is “slut shaming” with guys too*” and he thought it was morally

wrong. They also explained that whenever girls would send a nude picture to their boyfriend, who exposed those pictures on social media, when things turn sour (in that relationship) that there are laws today prohibiting the posting of nude personal pictures on social media. Some of the participants expressed that they would never send a nude picture to any boyfriend; while some were honest to say if they trust their boyfriend they would indeed send a nude picture. Lastly, we asked participants should “friends with benefits” and a committed relationship be viewed in the same moral context. They all agreed that both should be viewed as morally acceptable. With these statements and viewpoints from the focus group participants, it is very clear that our culture and social media have become a platform to create a new sexual script and the exploitation of our young people, which is a negative thing in their opinion. At the same time, they all realize that every decision that they make in their sexual life, comes with consequences.

Self-Image and Sexuality

Self-image was a huge factor in the discussions, in which the overall focus group perceived as: no one is going to love them, or rather have sex with them, if they are not sexually attractive by the social norm of society. In particular, two participants felt rejected sexually, because they were considered as a “fat girl.” The rest of the group didn’t have much to say. However, one participant explained about being a plus size in our society that has so many double standards. These double standards can be defined as “thin shaming” and “fat shaming,” meaning if a person (boy, girl) is fat or thin, they will always be judged in our society. At the same time we also learned that 5 out of 9 participants were pressured to have non-consensual premarital sex because of their low self-esteem and image. The participants seemed very upset and emotional when sharing

this horrible peer-pressured sexual experience, but in some ways they seemed to have strived to overcome the ordeal. Primarily, the participants who were victims saw the experiences as life learning lessons that only made them stronger. On the other hand, we saw the deep emotional after-effects on both (girls/boys) participants. More profoundly one participant was so emotional when he shared his struggles with self-image. He expressed the challenges, and peer pressure that he faces with other guys and even his siblings. At one point he shared with the focus group a humiliating encounter that he experienced, when a popular girl from high school gave him her cell phone number for him to call them, and when he did, the girl and her friends started laughing at him in the background. Obviously, the girls were not interested in him. As a result, the participant always questions the reason why any girl really wants to talk with him! He also stated that, *“being an actor has help me to strive to become a confident person, even if it takes fake confidence to succeed, but it really challenges you and push you to achieve your dreams and goals in life,”* and added that, he has come to the realization that his brothers are not him and he is a uniquely created person. The rest of the group didn’t have much to say, but offered kind words of encouragements.

Emotional, Spiritual and Negative Effects of Premarital Sex

Moving forward with the discussions, we wanted to understand the participant’s knowledge and perceptions relating to the spiritual and emotional consequences and risks of premarital sex. As a result, they all struggled to explain other consequences and risks. Above all, what we have experienced and observed during the focus group discussions was the emotional and spiritual after-effects from the breakups of a sexual relationship among some of the participants. Earlier in our discussions, one participant could hardly

refrain from showing how emotionally distraught he was after his relationship ended. Somehow, for others who were mostly affected internalized the experience as one participant describes, *"I feel like everything is a learning lesson, because it's a reason why people break up, such as cheating, unfaithfulness! Of course you're going to go through sadness, depression, but I feel it's something that you shouldn't worry about in a relationship, rather it's just like being in the moment."* Yet, their facial expressions and body language showed emotional and spiritual hurt. For instance, one participant described the spiritual aspects as, *"you cannot almost disconnect,"* meaning even though she was involved in an abusive relationship, it was difficult to disconnect her feelings from the abuser. The participant also added that, *"you feel like the person is still with you in a weird way. I feel like when you have sex with someone you have a piece of them with you always,"* (the group chuckle and laugh at what was being said); at the same time 5 out of 9 participants agreed. Most profoundly, the participant sadly asked me in a personal interview, *"How can I break bad soul ties,"* which will be discussed in the personal interview section. While other participants expressed no form of negative emotional and spiritual effects after their sexual relationship was ended, but concluded that, if the relationship ends with a mutual agreement, it was easier to deal with the emotional and spiritual aspects of the breakup.

In our discussions, we found that hookup, uncommitted, sexual encounters or "friends with benefits" sexual relationships can affect their moral values as well as, cause spiritual, emotional and even suicidal behaviors. We have seen cases where some of these types of sexual behavior have led to domestic violence abuse. Additionally, we observed a number of other complex factors that have influenced the young adults' sexual

behaviors, such as independence of choice, identity, liberal sexual attitude that differ from their parents due to the cultural shift in our society.

Domestic Violence and Unhealthy Relationship

Throughout the discussions, we have discovered situations of “Domestic Violence” and Unhealthy Relationships emerging among participants. In one case, (prior to the focus group discussion) the police was involved with a physical altercation between one participant and her ex-boyfriend. She shared and explained to the focus group that she found out that her boyfriend was sexing another girl, so she did the same thing back to him, which resulted in a physical altercation while driving in a car. The ex-boyfriend became physically abusive and started to punch her in her face while they were driving together in a car. When this information was revealed to us, we took the necessary steps to make sure the participant was safe and have support, as well as, to protect the safety of the focus group participants. In the process, we also realized that a few of the participants have experienced similar abusive situations within their relationships, but not to the extent where the police was involved. In the same manner, the discussion prompted one participant who talked about the struggles in her relationship, but for some reason, she kept making excuses for her fiancé’s unhealthy behavior. Interestingly, not one of the participants made a comment or associated the unhealthy behavior as a form of domestic violence. This suggests to us that the focus group participants have no concept of what a healthy relationship should be like, between two individuals who are in a sexual relationship.

Young Adults, Attitudes, Beliefs, and Perceptions of the Church

With what we have learned so far among the focus group participants in this discussion as it relates to the church (community of faith believers), we asked the following question: “Due to the fact that sin destroys our human relationship with God, in what way can the community of faith believers offers the redeeming word of forgiveness to young adults who are struggling with premarital sex?” Surprisingly, the entire focus group started to laugh, for a second I thought they did not understand question, but they actually did. One participant pretty much summarized the question by saying,

It’s pretty much what’s happening to people dealing with the issue whether or not they want to have sex or whether or not they had that sex, and now they are afraid that God is going to judge them for it. How do we show them that God will forgive them even though they did something bad, I don’t want to say it’s bad! I understand that it’s a horrible thing the Bible say about sex before marriage, (whatever) but they also used to like stone people because they were horrible. Things change and I feel like to tell someone that, what you did is wrong, is going to push them away, from wanting to be a part of the church and not bring them towards it.

Also, a majority of participants believed the church (community of faith believers) is very judgmental, in their attitudes towards young adults who are sexually active, homosexuals, lesbians, bi-sexual and transsexual people. One participant added that, *“I also feel like the church should focus on character, like I know actions reflect on who you are, but I feel like the Bible deem sex as bad, I also feel they need to focus on character, because sex does not define your life!”* As a result, we ask the focus group what churches can do to provide a non-judgmental atmosphere for all, regardless of race, sex, sexual orientation including those who are having sex before marriage. The participants struggled to give suggestions, while some thought the church could have pamphlets with pertinent information on sex for young people.

We asked another question saying, “Because we live in a culture where sex sells everything, should the church be more accepting, embracing, and tolerant in engaging in dialogues with young adults about sex?” One participant said,

I do, but I also feel like they need to make sure that people know the consequences of their decisions, because tolerance can be seen as leniency, and people feel like it’s OK. At the same time, (it is what it is), and you just have to make sure you’re ready to deal with the consequences. I feel like churches should be open about it, but let them know especially with younger people, that this could happen to you, and it has happened to people like you, and you’re not one in billion that it doesn’t happen to. Also the state law is age 16, and not because we’re talking about it gives them the permission to have sex.

Based on this participant’s statement we ask, “How about discussion with clergy and parents?” One participant responded and said, “Sometime parents don’t want to hear what clergy has to say to them regarding their kids.” Overall, the majority of participants think resources would be helpful for parents, if they need information; however, they do believe parents need to force sex education on children. From our overall observation, the statement the focus group made about parents needing to force sex education on their children is very powerful. Clearly, the participants do not believe it is the responsibility of the church, but rather the parents. It was also important for us to know if the focus group participants felt comfortable to talk about sex and human sexuality in a religious setting. One participant stated that, “*she does not feel comfortable talking about sex and sexuality among the older people within the congregation, but she does not have a problem talking to me*” (moderator). Another commented that,

When I first heard about the focus group from my best friend, I was a bit leery, but when I came in and you explain what you were talking about, you kinda made me feel like open to talk to you regularly, like you’re not going to judge, and that helps a lot. Because I feel like a lot of religious people (older) tend to be very judgmental. (The group responded by saying old fashioned.) The participant went on to say, “Because you said everything relates to us and in general, helps and made us comfortable

talking to you. Even talking to my mom about things like Caitlyn Jenner, she is not that open, but she's open for the most part. And if I talk to my mom about sex the first thing she said oh I hope you're not doing it and I said no mom I'm just talking in general. I think people can become so judgmental if you ask a question thinking it's something that you're doing and just not a question that you're asking in general to obtain information. In your case Ingrid you presented to us, that you're open and you wanted to hear what we have to say, our opinions, and that made it easier to talk to you about it. And I feel like if it were presented this way, there would be more open dialogue's amongst young and older adults about religion and sex.

Lastly, we asked, would it be beneficial for churches to have a young adult ministry led by young adults? One participant said, *"I think it's great because young people know how to talk to young people, so they can communicate different biblical perspective in a new light."* Another added, *"It's great that seminary people like you are doing this discussion, so you can get a better understanding of young people, to go out there and do ministry with young people."* Two other participants have experienced young adult ministry setting at their church and expressed how much they really enjoyed it.

Young Adult's Family History, Patterns and Traits

For this discussion session, each focus group participant was asked to prepare and present an overview of their genealogy. This exercise was to gain a deeper understanding of their family generational background, as well as to allow them to identify positive and negative family patterns, beliefs, and traits. In the process of the discussion, participants were then asked to identify which family patterns and trait they thought were positive and would like to keep in their future family. Overall, a vast majority of participants identify the following patterns:

- Marriages
- Divorces
- Children out of Wedlock
- Infidelity
- Alcoholism
- Depression
- Anxiety
- Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)
- Drug Addiction
- Mental Health Disorder
- Chronic Diseases/Conditions (Bipolar Mood Disorder, Schizophrenia, Cancer, Diabetes, Heart failure, High Blood Pressure, Obesity).

As it relates to marriage, 2 out of 9 participants have a strong family history of marriage, although there were a few divorces in some cases. In the case of divorces, many of the focus group participants identify this pattern, and one participant had double and triple divorces in their family history. Additionally, one participant was born out of wedlock, and this participant said the grandmother was 1 of 13 children, who was married to the grandfather who had other children outside the marriage. Other participants shared history of infidelity in their family. In the discussion, 4 out of 9 talked about alcoholism, and one participant's great-grandmother and grandmother were alcoholics, which now run in the family, with a history of drug addiction among older siblings. This participant also believes alcohol is used in the family to detach their emotion, and as a result, the participant is suicidal and struggles with depression which also runs in the family. Other focus group participants identified depression as well, and only one identifies with anxiety attacks in their family. Overall 3 out of 9 participants identify themselves with depression, and only one participant struggle with anxiety attack, and were also diagnosed with ADHD. We found that one participant's parent has a case of mental health disorder; two participants shared patterns of obesity, while many participants shared forms of chronic diseases and conditions within family history. In the

interim, the focus group participants were also able to identify the following traits in their family history. Some of the participants identify traits which they described as controlling, abusive and other dysfunctional behaviors within their families. It must be noted that weight and height were was a major factor among the participants and they all hope they will be able to change that particular trait for the sake of their future kids. On the other hand, participants talked about the close relationships and family togetherness, the strong religious/Christians beliefs/faith, and the spiritual aspects and values of family. All these traits were strongly admired by the focus group in their own view, and will become a part of their future history. This was a very emotional and insightful discussion with the focus group. The young adults were absolutely knowledgeable, very brave and vocal about their family history. Most importantly they were able to reflect on their family dysfunctions, and selected the patterns and traits that will become a solid foundation for them throughout their adulthood development.

Focus Group Participant's Individual Presentations

As this was our final focus group discussion, each participant was asked to share their overall authentic experiences during our 4 weeks discussions including any comments and suggestions they would like to share as a group.

Participants Personal Interviews

As part of the study, the research provided personal interviews for focus group participants who were interested. As a result, the study conducted three personal interviews among the focus group. The similarities among all three participants in the personal interviews were based on unhealthy abusive relationships, commitment, sexual peer pressure, self-esteem and personal self-identify. We have discussed these issues on

the surface in our focus group discussions. Nevertheless, participants wanted to share more in-depth experiences and encounters they have had in previous and current relationships. One participant shared with me that she is suicidal and has attempted to commit suicide on several occasions, the last attempt was in 2015. This individual has been a “cutter” who does self-injury since early teen and is now 20 years of age. I asked why, and was told that she lacks the love and attention from her family who never showed her love, and that they are non-emotional and do not engage in conversations with her. This individual is also in a physically abusive relationship, because she feels her boyfriend is the only person who cares and loves her, even though he cheats with other girls, which creates the abusive behavior in their relationship. In another interview, one participant had a difficult time defining her views as it relates to commitment in a relationship. This seems to be a problem and challenge for most of the young adults. It would appear that they want to be in committed faithful relationships, but do not know how to establish boundaries in their relationships. The failure to establish boundaries in their relationships can also be attributed to how they view themselves in terms of self-esteem, self-value and self-identity. I asked one participant to tell me from a scale of 1-10 how much she loves herself and she replied and said “I only like myself.” This was rather disturbing to hear, but would make sense as to why one would be in an unhealthy relationship. More importantly is how can we help young adults to build strong self-esteem and moral values in their relationships.

The last interview was very interesting. This participant and boyfriend are a part of the focus group discussion. In the interview, the participant revealed to me that she is bisexual. This was somewhat shocking to hear, and so I asked her to explain when did

she first become aware of this aspect of her life. She further explained to me that when she was 11 or 12 years old, she was influenced by Katy Perry's song "I Kissed A Girl" while playing with her best friend and decided to kiss her best friend. Several years later, she realizes that she is sexually, romantically attracted to guys, but is physically attracted to male and female. The participant seemed confused at times, and is not quite clear in terms of her human sexuality. Nevertheless, these are the realities and the lives of the emerging young adults of the 21st century.

CHAPTER 9 RESULTS

The process of articulating and summarizing the data took me 3-4 months, because I became so immersed in the research study and needed to deeply reflect and process the invaluable information that was shared and expressed among the focus group participants. Then again, it was very disturbing and painful to hear the Christian, young adults' past and present sexual experiences. This experience actually brought back some of my early adolescent sexual experiences that originally made me so intentional and dedicated to hear the voices of the young adults from a Single Adults Ministry Leader perspective. At the same time, I had to be aware of my own biases which were not easy to constrict, but I had to be able to hear and see each situation from its individual social location. Every one of the young adults who participated has shown respect, vulnerability, honesty and were very courageous to share personal experiences, even embarrassing situations. The experiences they shared were insightfully informative, yet quite disturbing.

Taking everything into account and presenting the final results with integrity was emotionally exhausting, yet profoundly rewarding. In this deliberative process, we focused on (a) how to develop an interpretive framework that addresses the foundational research questions within the context of ministry and (b) how to construct a theory from the interpretations of the data for parents, religious/faith communities, and ministry, as critical conscious awareness and growth transformation. In this reflective theological

process, we came to a deeper understanding of key contributing factors that influenced the young adult's attitudes, beliefs and perceptions of sex and sexuality in the context of premarital sex. Based on the results of focus group discussions and personal interviews, we found several key themes emerged that we firmly believe are contributing factors to the young adult's attitudes, decisions and premarital sexual behaviors:

- Culture, social media, and sub-culture within their colleges/universities
- Ongoing sexual activity of Christian Young Adults
- Lack of biblical education and guidance on sex and human sexuality.
- Failure of parents/families and religious/faith leaders to provide safe, open, and honest "sex talk" dialogues for adolescents and young adults
- Christian beliefs, stigmas, taboos and injunctions on sex and sexuality
- Lack of moral development for young adults to establish moral values
- Differences in attitudes toward sex and human sexuality within generational cohorts

Today, Christian young adults live in a contemporary popular culture where the media representation of sex and sexuality demonstrates a pervasive attitude that has deeply influenced their sexual decisions. In support of these facts and realities, research studies found that a third of all freshmen in high school, primarily 14 and 15 year olds, have had sex, which is not surprising considering the sex-saturated culture we live in today. The reality is that we all live in a sex-saturated cultural environment that is highly impacted by various forms of social media technology. Christian, college-age, young adults in our focus group described social media as the life they breathe, which has become an inseparable part of their daily lives, especially when away from home in colleges and universities. According to professor of Media and Religion Studies Stewart

M. Hoover, it is inevitable, almost impossible for anyone (much less young adults) to avoid the media these days, because it presents itself in so many different forms.⁷⁶

In our focus group discussion sessions we were shocked when we found that most of the young adults became sexually active during their early adolescent childhood years. We also found that they are engaging in sexual activities without an understanding of their sexuality and spirituality from a biblical perspective. However, they did express a deep desire to engage in meaningful, committed, healthy fulfilling, loving sexual relationships, but they obviously needed guidance, and practical biblical knowledge, in order to establish moral values, which are not evident in their lives.

It became evident in our discussions that the Christian young adults lack moral values, and as a result, they struggled to determine right from wrong, in establishing sexual boundaries. We also found that when parents engaged in conversations with young adults, they feel a sense of love, which allows them to become comfortable to talk about sex and are able to make moral decisions about their sexual behavior that reflect those of their parent.

In our Family Genealogy History discussion presentation, participants were asked to share their family history. In their presentations, they were able to identify and distinguished the positive traits/moral values from the negative ones. Where the moral values of parents were questionable, most young adults were able to distinguish what moral values and traits they thought were good and positive to build their future family foundations. Overall, we believe that the participants have been deprived of a biblical

⁷⁶ Stewart M. Hoover, *Religion in the Media Age* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 142.

foundation and guidance on God's good gift of sex, from their parents, and religious/faith leaders and educators.

There are many sources of sexual information available to young adults if parents and religious leaders are unwilling to provide it, although not all of that information may be positive or valid. We also found that Christian, college-age, young adults have obtained a variety of explicit sex information from the media, including peers and siblings during their adolescent's years; and the overall majority of participants who identify themselves as Christians admitted that media has the most influence on their sexual attitudes, identity and behaviors. Several studies have found that the media has a powerful influence on the sexual attitudes and behavior of adolescents,⁷⁷ which correlates with the findings in our study. Fortunately, some colleges and universities are initiating or developing dialogues related to 'hookup' and the 'friends with benefits' sub-culture (very important themes in our discussions) within their institutions.

Young adults' lives are shaped by a variety and diversity of choice and lifestyle that are available to them, and all these choices are made in relation to their personal fulfillment and emotional happiness of their human expressions of sex and sexuality. These realities led us to examine how the young adult's moral values are shaped, and how they make sexual decisions in their lives. According to sociologist William Ogburn, parents, church and state are the three primary agents of socialization within the social technological changes in our society.⁷⁸ Young adults revealed that two of these agents of socialization (parents and church) were not available in the lives of our young adults. For

⁷⁷ Eldrie Gouws, Nicky Kruger, Sanet Kruger, and Dorothy Snyman, *The Adolescent* (Johannesburg: Heinemann, 2008), 110.

⁷⁸ William F. Ogburn, *On Culture and Social Change* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1964), 63.

this reason they rely more and more on the media and are highly influenced by their cultural environment on sexual matters, because sex is usually not discussed by parents or in churches. More profoundly, Walt Mueller founder and president of the Center for Parent/Youth Understanding stated that both media and the young adults are dependent on each other.⁷⁹ In other words, the media need the young adults from a socio-economic standpoint, and young adult's thinks they need media for guidance on sexual matters.

According to McDowell, parents/families are not aware that although culture and media has a strong influence in the lives of adolescents and young adults, research shows that family life does have the greatest influence in the life of children.⁸⁰ In other words, parent/family is the primary agent of socialization, in which adolescents and young adults come to an understanding of their God-given gift of sex and human sexuality, in light of culture, themselves and God.⁸¹

The parent/family is more than just a structure, but assists and guides in the process of moral development, so that identity, self-esteem, moral character, values, and spiritual formation can begin to shape in their lives.⁸² We found that a vast majority of participants in our focus groups struggle with their identity and self-esteem which is associated with their sexual expressions and affects their sexual decisions because they lack moral development.

⁷⁹ Walt Mueller, *Engaging the Soul of Youth Culture: Bridging Teen Worldviews and Christian Truths* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 116.

⁸⁰ Josh McDowell, *The Last Christian Generation* (Holiday, FL: Green Key Books, 2006), 260-263.

⁸¹ Malan Nel, *An Youth Ministry: An Inclusive Congregational Approach* (Pretoria: Kitskopie, 2000), 19.

⁸² Ray Sherman Anderson, *The Shape of Practical Theology: Empowering Ministry with Theological Praxis* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 260-263.

Given the complex issues, one can understand and sympathize with a parent/family or church in its difficulties in talking about sex and sexuality in our homes, churches and society. It was during a personal interview when I became aware of some of the complexities relating to gender identity within a heterosexual relationship. The vast majority of focus group participants received their first education on sex in their public schools, which is another form of socialization that we recognized as agent in their sexual education. Abstinence programs in most public schools today are under scrutiny, because most Americans want schools to teach a more comprehensive sex education to their children.⁸³ We support (with parents' permission) public schools teachings on sex education such as reproductive biological factors, contraception methods and sexually transmitted infections (STIs), and the transmission of medically accurate information.

We do not support relinquishing the obligations of parents to provide moral and biblical guidance on sex and sexuality to their children; by delegating their obligation and duty to others, (such as the schools/churches), including minister leaders like myself. We believe that the desire to pass on responsibility is associated with parents/families and faith community leaders lack of awareness about sex education knowledge and preparation. When they have knowledge they tend to act. Planned Parenthood reported that eighty two percent of parents have talked to their children about topics related to sex and sexuality, which is very encouraging to know. Nevertheless, they also believe that the difficulties parents/families have talking with their children about topics on sex and

⁸³ Kaiser Family Foundation, National Public Radio, and Harvard University, *Sex Education in America* (Menlo Park, CA: Kaiser, 2004).

sexuality, is due to the complexity, concerns, and nature of the questions being asked,⁸⁴ which we encountered in our group discussions and interviews. This new finding underscores the importance of what the study has developed, to help parents, religious/faith leaders/educators and young adults engage in interactive honest and open “sex talk” ongoing dialogues within their homes and faith communities.

Still, the unanswered question we grapple with in our research study is: “Why is it so difficult to talk about sex?” Well, upon reflecting I could have gained some insights, but unfortunately I missed a good opportunity to provide results due to time constraints of the study. In any case, it was after the course of the research study that I was approached by parents of the focus group participants at (LPC) with thankfulness, affirmation, and appreciation with a sense of relief, expressing how glad they were that I was involved in the lives of young adults, and “the things” (meaning sex) that I am teaching the young adults, is so important. As one parent said to me, “I couldn’t do that, it’s not easy, but you are good with them.” Based on these comments, it seems evident that parents need assistance in engaging in “sex talk” dialogue with adolescents and young adults. Also, based on other research findings, we also discovered that the role of parents in young adults’ development is only just beginning to be studied and appreciated. Similarly, it was quite surprising that in our research we did not come across any studies that sought to explain why sex is so difficult to talk about in the church, especially with what is at stake with our adolescents and young people today.

⁸⁴ Planned Parenthood Federation of America, “New Poll: Parents are Talking with Their Kids about Sex but Often Not Tackling Harder Issues,” <https://www.plannedparenthood.org/about-us/newsroom/press-releases/new-poll-parents-talking-their-kids-about-sex-often-not-tackling-harder-issues> (accessed December 12, 2015).

A factor and challenge for Christian young adults including religious/faith leaders and educators is their teachings on premarital sexual ethics. From my experience as a Single Adults Ministry leader in the Church, I have come to the realization that a majority of pastors and ministry leaders are not quite certain how to provide biblical guidance to adolescent and young adults who are sexually active. Most assuredly, we are aware that the church believes that sexual intercourse should be reserved exclusively for marriage. On the other hand, a vast number of Christians and non-Christians young adults today are rejecting the church's traditional biblical principles and standpoint on premarital sex. As a result, this leaves adolescents and young adults in a precarious place of instability with no guidance on sexual matters, which we found to be a crucial concern among focus group participants.

While we respect beliefs of churches, we also believe that churches need to take into consideration and recognize how the media has become a dominant source of sex education in our society and culture while they remain silent of moral issues affecting adolescents and young adults within our homes and communities. Additionally, the silence of the church on sexual matters also puts parents/families in a difficult position to provide appropriate, and much needed sex information and guidance for their adolescents and young adults. In fact, based on our study discussions, we strongly believe that faith communities can assist parents/families in availing themselves to be more comfortable, and cognizant with their own sexuality in a variety of ways. This partnership support will enable both parent/family and faith communities to become open to have "sex talks" with their adolescents and young adults.

However, the focus group participants do not believe faith community leaders should surmount the role and responsibility of the parent/family as the primary sex educator for their children, but become a partnership to assist and provide moral guidance and education. After all, sex is a good gift, created by God to be enjoyed in its proper context, and is not intrinsically evil but can be a good if adolescents and young adults know the consequences and risks as well. Nevertheless, based on the abundance of literature that examined sex and sexuality, we found that there is a shortage of current research on how Protestant churches within their communities provide sex and human sexuality information and guidance, as well as create a healthy environment within their faith communities to engage interactively in “sex talk” dialogue among adolescents and emerging adults.

Therefore, we firmly believe parents and religious communities need to partner together to provide sex and sexuality education within their homes and faith communities because our young adults are deeply in need of biblical and spiritual guidance. Let’s face it, a majority of adolescents and young adults are having premarital sex today in our society and culture. As it relates to older generational differences in terms of views on sex and sexuality, we found that the culture we live in today, does not reflect the world in which the older generations were born and raised. Nevertheless, at some point all generational cohorts must strive to build a bridge of solidarity for human dignity in terms of sex and human sexuality. In the meantime, one need remember that culture is a learned and shared experience and does not exist in a vacuum.⁸⁵ Responses by young adults in our study revealed that Christian, young adults need biblical understanding of their God-

⁸⁵ Mueller, *Engaging the Soul of Youth Culture*, 116.

given gift of sex and human sexuality; spiritual guidance and moral development as they develop into adulthood; and to learn how to respond appropriately to our contemporary cultural sex saturated society, to be able to make informed and healthy sexual decisions that affects their whole life.

Without a doubt, people in general (Christians, non-Christians) find it extremely difficult to talk about sex because it is a sensitive, personal, and indeed an awkward topic that raises feelings of embarrassment, shame or inadequacy. Further, talking about sex comes with the risks or stigma associated with judgment, vulnerability, rejection, ridicule, and even confusion. Difficulties in talking about sex can be attributed to the negative burdensome connotations and legacy left by the early Church Fathers, and Augustine in particular, regarding sex and human sexuality since antiquity. Despite the taboos, perceptions, ideologies, and ambiguities surrounding sex, we cannot deny the fact that sex and human sexuality is an important aspect of our human existence and a good mysterious gift from God our Creator. Therefore, I firmly believe, that it is imperative to have “sex talk” dialogical conversations that will educate, inform, affirm, give guidance to prepare young adults to engage in healthy sexual behaviors. In doing this, we will prevent premature, sexually painful experiences and hurtful memories that our adolescents have to bear and carry with them throughout their lives. It is fundamental for parents and religious/faith leaders to be intentional in seeking ways through different lenses, to engage interactively in “sex talk” dialogues within their homes communities, with parent, adolescents and young adults.

CHAPTER 10

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: NEW SEXUAL MORALITY

Why a Prophetic “Sex Talk Table Forum”

One may ask: “What is the purpose of a Prophetic Sex Talk Table Forum?” Well, because the topic of sex is not often discussed in many churches and as a Single Adults Ministry Leader over years, I have developed a table talk forum setting to engage single adults on sex-related topics from a biblical perspective. This allows members within the group to feel comfortable, to share their stories and perspectives on the subject matter. For this reason, each member within the group feels a sense of belonging, knowing that their voices are welcome and valued, as opposed to an authoritative style of teaching that does not take into consideration, what others have to offer at the table.

The table talk forum concept was inspired by Paulo Freire, one of the most influential radical education theorists in the 20th century, who describes the system of “banking education” that inhibits creative critical thinking, one’s concerns and questions, in a teaching and learning environment. Oftentimes leaders in ministry are viewed as the only ones with knowledge. This authoritative approach in some instances can conceal certain facts; and do not address ambiguities and theological debates/concerns related to myths, ideologies and doctrines, especially when discussing sex related topics.⁸⁶

⁸⁶ Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, trans. Myra Bergman Ramos (London: Sheed and Ward, 1972), 3-4.

Because this research study focus group participants are Christian, college-age, young adults, my objective was to find effective, creative and innovative methodologies to conduct the research discussion sessions. The “sex talk table forum” attracted and encouraged a quite sizable sample of Christian young adults from LPC and the surrounding community. More importantly, it is very infrequent that young adults in general are afforded an opportunity within the church and with their parents to engage in open and honest conversations on topics related to sex, due to the many misconceptions, taboos, biblical interpretations, and the ambiguities concerning sexual matters. The “sex table talk forum” provided a great opportunity in a more contemporary setting that is safe for young adults within a faith community to gather and share their voices, and express their attitudes, beliefs, and perceptions of their own experiences and sexual development in support of the study, as it relates to sex and human sexuality in the context of premarital sex.

Overall, based on the study’s outcome, we do believe it was a great conceptual idea that accomplished the objective of the study and that the concept of a “sex table talk forum” can be extended as a platform to engage religious/faith leaders, parents and young people within their communities, allowing them to come together to break the silence of sex related topics and to discuss relevant sex related issues that are affecting many within our faith communities.

Indeed, this was a risky and ambitious approach in the study because young adults in general, do not necessarily want to discuss their private sex life with anyone, due to judgment, shame, fear, and ridicule. However, this particular group of young adults felt very privileged and comfortable that someone in the church really cared, and gave them

the opportunity, respect and affirmation to share their voices; and believe me, they had a lot to say during our focus group discussion sessions and personal interviews. It is also important to note that most of our focus group sessions lasted between 2-3 hours, and all participants were committed and attended the 4 weeks “sex talk table forum” session duration, with anticipation, eagerness, enthusiasm, gratefulness and hope.

The “sex talk table forum” experience with the young adults was very enjoyable, transformative, informative, emotional and reflective from my perspective. Therefore, after a reflective critical conscious awareness and a debriefing conversation with the site-team committee, we strongly believe that a “sex talk table forum” is a great alternative proactive platform that LPC can implement in a more extended form within their church curriculum, for young adults who seek biblical/theological understanding, guidance and affirmation regarding their God given gift of sex, and as a part of the author’s “Great Commission” and call to ministry.

Hermeneutical Space for Prophetic “Sex Talk Table Forum” Dialogue

In truth, many churches have too long ignored the spiritual aspects of young adults and have denied them their right to speak from their experience and cultural perspective. Further, from a moral integrity standpoint, as religious/faith community leaders we must reclaim and prevent the continuation of silence and dehumanizing aggression against ourselves, others and especially our adolescents and young adults in our homes, churches and communities, regardless of sex, gender, race, marital status, and sexual orientation. Therefore, for churches or religious institutions that might be interested to develop a hermeneutical space for “sex talk table forum” it is most essential

to know that the setting for discussions is safe, non-judgmental and fosters a welcoming environment for our 21st century young adults.

The “dialogue” is the key factor in meaningful and effective discussions among young adults. In essence, dialogues are more than just conversations because they are more focused on intentional conversations in a space of civility, openness, honesty, and equality in which those who differ may listen and speak together with respect and solidarity. Dialogue, then, creates a path of being mindful, giving a voice to the voiceless and marginalized. The pedagogical aim here is to seek, be vulnerable, reason, reflect, ponder, grapple and set aside fears and preconceptions, while those facilitating take time to hear other voices and possibilities, and respond with compassion and humility.

This reflection has led me to share another invaluable insight from Freire, that a dialogical encounter helps people to develop critical consciousness of their contradictions, enabling them to take action against these contradictions. Freire’s invaluable insights also reminds us that any form of “dialogue” cannot take place between those who want to impose their standpoints on issues relating to sex and human sexuality, while denying others (young adults) the right to speak and share their experience ⁸⁷ and perspective on sexual matters. First, this dialogical encounter must acknowledge sex and sexuality as a continuum, which will affirm young men and women to engage in their own sexual moral development, desire and growth while they move throughout the seasons of life and relationship. More importantly, discussions on premarital sex cannot be left to telling our young adults to “just say no,” because in all honesty (based on focus group discussions), we all have failed to educate and provide

⁸⁷ Freire, *Pedagogy*, 43, 76-77.

guidance to our young adults on moral sexual issues, as parents and faith community leaders.

On that account, we move further in support of the implementation of a “sex talk table forum” where I would like to propose as an effective model for teaching and learning what Thomas H. Groome describes as “Shared Christian Praxis” also known as the “Meta Narrative” approach to religious education.⁸⁸

In his book *Sharing Faith*, Groome takes a contemporary approach to religious education that fosters and creates an environment for interactive dialogue among people of faith. This contemporary Meta narrative approach allows each participant to ask pressing questions and share their own stories from their social location, rather than an authoritative style of teaching that imposes one’s biblical interpretations on others. In addition, the pedagogical aim is to engage those involved to discuss sexual matters freely, while providing guidance, educating parents, young adults and others within our church and communities about sex and human sexuality. Ultimately, the aim is to bring healing life to faith that seeks understanding, and hope in the lives of those who seek guidance, understanding and affirmation of their God given gift of sex and human sexuality (See Fig. 6).

⁸⁸ Groome, *Sharing Faith*, 280-296.

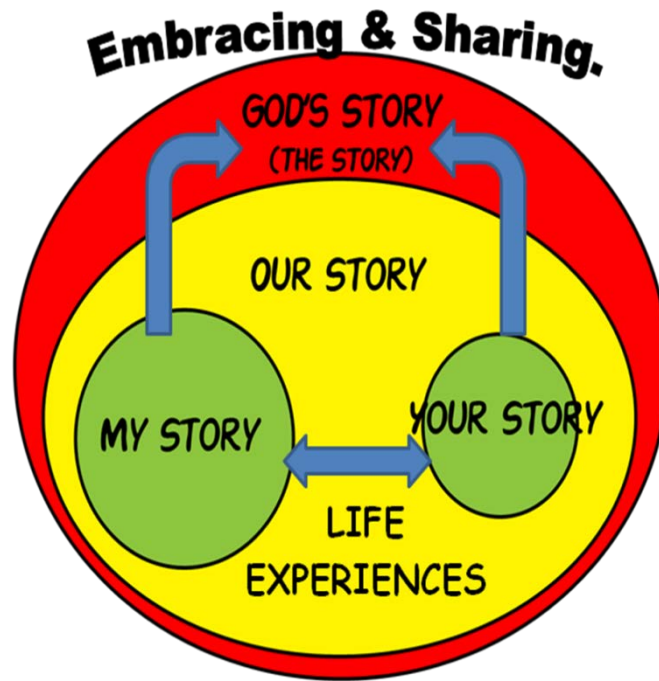


Figure 6 Meta Narrative Transformation ⁸⁹

Groome’s “Shared Christian Praxis” is important as it relates sex and human sexuality, as we must evaluate our “Christianness” in light of its faithfulness to the Christian message based on God’s *agape* love and compassion. This theological reflection questions our lack of “intelligibility,” making sense to some Christians, while it may not make sense to others.⁹⁰ In essence, as Christians, we must seek to fashion a fresh exposition of our faith as it relates to sex and sexuality.

Throughout history, the Church has always been the bearer of traditions. As story-making creatures we are compelled to make sense of our embedded beliefs and experiences through recollections and interpretations of biblical narratives. Our narration

⁸⁹ A time to break the silence and engage in dialogue, with interconnectedness, embracing, healing, understanding each other stories, and how they relate to biblical stories relating to sex and human sexuality.

⁹⁰ Howard W. Stone and James O. Duke, *How to Think Theologically* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2003), 34.

gives meaning to our experiences and traditions, and channels our responses to become a part of our biblical hermeneutic interpretations, expressions and experiences, in support of the study regarding sex and human sexuality. In this process, one hermeneutics of suspicion should then seek to reason from a deliberative theological perspective, which is to reflect upon one's embedded beliefs in order to make sense of one's personal viewpoint, and to think critically on what biblical stories and traditions we support, as well as which of those stories and traditions we no longer want to honor.

In this deliberative process, the traditions we seek to honor should function as living components within our faith communities, to aid moral developments, establish source of content for ethics, as a framework of accountability in the moral life that will help to shape the future moral identities of our young adults, and give guidance for future moral actions. The Christian moral life involves four distinct roles, whereas, each aids the other and none cannot be dispense without the Christian moral life ⁹¹ (figure 7).

⁹¹ Bruce C. Brich and Larry Rasmussen, *Bible and Ethics in the Christian Life* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Press, 1976), 1-3.

A Hermeneutical Process for Moral Formation

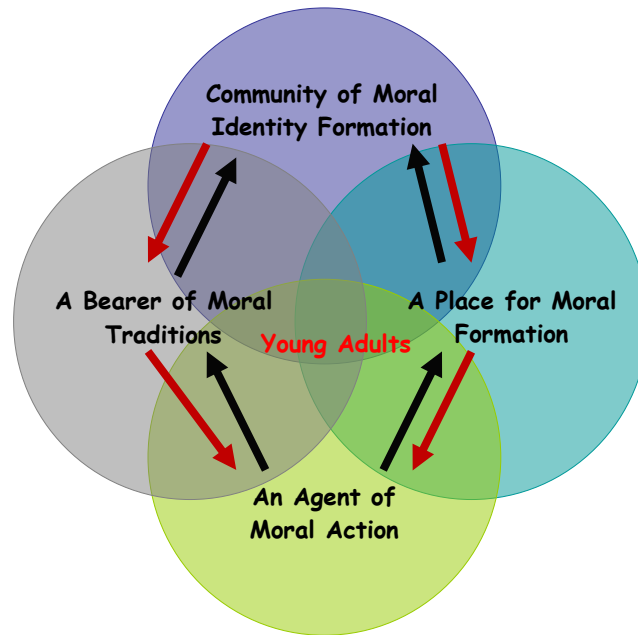


Figure 7 Christian Moral Life Circle

Defense: A New Sexual Morality for Premarital Sex

So far, we have identified and discussed key factors relating to premarital sex among young adults in our study, with the awareness that they have been sexually active since they were adolescents. On this account, from a Christian Single Adults Ministry Leader perspective, I firmly believe there is critical relevance and deep concern to seek a fresh exposition to develop a new sexual morality, within the meaning of the Christian faith, according to the gospel message⁹² living in the 21st century. In truth, Christians are all faced with making moral decisions each day of their lives, considering the society and culture we live in. For instance, morality confronts everyone at their jobs, churches, and

⁹² Ibid., 125.

presents itself in the evening news including their homes. In all honesty, in this moment one must come face to face with sexual morality, not only for young adults, but also for unmarried people who have been dehumanized of their human rights and dignity as it relates to premarital sex. Firstly, to speak of dehumanization, I am referring to (a) Christian and non-Christian unmarried people who have (b) been deprived of their right to express their God-given gift of sex and human sexuality historically to present. This recognition and critical conscious awareness, is not only from an ontological perspective, but also from a human historical reality of an unjust social order.⁹³ As such, for anyone to understand dehumanization, they must have a clear understanding of what is being denied, which is one's humanness and right to their God-given gift of sex and human sexuality.

Secondly, theologically, hermeneutically and critically analyzed Scriptures, the Old Testament's ethical sexual guidelines, are patriarchal, and dehumanizing, and do not provide a solid foundational grounds for premarital sex and marriage. For instance, sex and sexuality from a moral and ethical standpoint is not as "sacred" as Christianity claimed it to be. From a Christian ethics and Biblical perspective, God created sex for marriage and procreation according to (Gen. 1:27-28). Therefore, from a logical standpoint it is difficult for single unmarried people within the church or Single Adults Ministry, to defend sex outside of marriage. However, from these viewpoints, how did King Solomon in the Old Testament have seven hundred wives and three hundred concubines, which was in direct violation to God's Word from a Biblical ethical perspective, and God allowed it (1King 11:3)? At the same time, it was Solomon who wrote the exotic love book we find in Songs of Solomon, illuminating the beautiful

⁹³ Ibid., Chap. 1.

essence of marriage, in which God had intended for humanity. It is also worth knowing that Solomon experienced the consequences in his old age, but God showed him mercy (1 King 11:11).

More perplexing is the notion of polygamy, which modern day Christians would view as sexually immoral—something the Bible does not explicitly condemn. The first instance of polygamy/bigamy in the Bible was with Lamech (Gen. 4:19), and several prominent men were polygamists, such as Abraham, Jacob, David and others, who all had multiple wives and concubines.

In (2 Sam. 12:8), God spoke through the prophet Nathan and said that if David's wives and concubines were not enough, God himself would have given David even more concubines. So we can gather, from a biblical and Christian ethical perspective, that it is possible that sex is not as "sacred" and restricted as Christians might want to believe. The more prophetic questions from a logical and hermeneutical view point is, how to teach our adolescents and young adults about the institution of marriage from a Biblical perspective, when there are no good examples of healthy, loving, committed marriage relationship in the Bible. The Old Testament ethical principles are very ambiguous when one reflect upon the practices of leaders such as King David, "man after God's own heart," who had eight wives (2 Sam. 12). In this case while Scriptures does not cover every situation throughout one's lives and its principles provides Christians with the standards in which to conduct ourselves (Col. 3:1-6). Still, how Christians interpret and understand Scriptures, must somehow connect with the realities of the moral issues they face as a community of faith believers. To our modern sensibilities, it is very difficult to comprehend why God allowed the unethical behaviors of biblical people who were called

to lead in those days. One thing for sure, is that God cannot lie, and the Bible gives the whole truth about biblical characters, including their sins, struggles, failures, victories, and good deeds, in order for Christians to learn from the biblical ancestors.

Another example is in the case where a couple becomes sexually active, but are not yet publically and officially engaged to each other, the Biblical punishment for that sexual encounter is “fifty shekels of silver,” to the young woman's father, and she automatically becomes the wife of her lover (Deut. 22:28). With all due respect to biblical times, but from modern day Christian sensibility, a marriage like that is viewed as a financial, economical contract within the institution of marriage. If these rigid biblical, philosophical and ideological views of sex and marriage are informed by particular religious, socio-cultural, and socio-political perspective, rather than by the gospel of Christ rooted in love, then Christianity is in a moral dilemma.

In like manner, as Christians leaders, we must theologically, reflect and ask ourselves, why does Christianity perpetuate an ideological view that premarital sex is a sin outside the context of marriage, based on Old Testament laws. Another theological reflection is that when biblical views and ideologies are imposed upon Christian young adults, what is the cost? Evidently, this is good example of why many adolescents and young adults are skeptical of the Church of Christ and have doubts in God their Creator.

Thirdly, there is no doubt that the contribution of what is often called cultural hermeneutics, which is the recognition that the biblical writers may have been working with presuppositions, in particular to their cultural and historical situations, concerning sexual immorality or premarital sex. The Apostle Paul had to take a risk as a leader of the church in his era; he faced the realities and addressed the situations of sexual immorality

in the Church of Corinth. More courageously, Paul dealt with the issue of his time, without a user manual or a word from the Lord (1 Cor. 7:6). Nevertheless, in addressing the issue of premarital sex Paul was not clear, although he ambiguously explained the gifts of marriage and celibacy. Most noticeably, he recognized and acknowledged that the ability to live a celibate/single life is a unique gift from God. Similarly, Paul's theology of premarital sex was associated and acceptable within marriage, but evidently it would seem as though his notion of marriage is also predicated upon one's sexual desires as he alluded, "But if they cannot exercise self-control, they should marry. For it is better to marry than to be aflame with passion (vs. 7-9).

However, it is crucial for one to understand that Paul made it clear that his theological sexual ethics was not a command from God, but a way of concession (vs. 6). From a leadership perspective, Paul believed he was called by God, and as an Apostle he took his right and privilege to address the issue of sexual immorality in his era. In the same breath as a servant of the Lord, church leaders today are commissioned to bring the good news of the gospels to the marginalized, bind up the brokenhearted and set the captives free, as led by the Holy Spirit.

Fourthly, any approach on sexual morality is a risk, because by its very nature, it is understandable that one will inevitably approach the subject of premarital sex based on one's social location, embedded beliefs, biases, perceptions, ignorance, shame, guilt and lack of knowledge. Oftentimes Christian leaders can become vulnerable to judgment, ridicule, criticism or even rejection. Regardless, of the risks and consequences, this work firmly and courageously argues for a new sexual morality for premarital sex, which the churches over the centuries have failed to address.

Guiding Educational Principles: Biblical and Christian Ethics Perspectives

From a Biblical and Christian ethics perspective, it is clear to say that a number of edifications in the Bible are obsolete. Indispensable, for Christians the Bible has always been an invaluable source for moral guidance. Biblical ethics then brings to light the inhibitions of relying only upon Scriptures as our authority (*sola scriptura*). On that account, even though the Bible may be the primary authority, it is not sufficiently broad based as authority for Christians in the modern Church.⁹⁴ In such a case, the Bible must be in constant dialogue with many other sources of knowledge and insight through which God Him Self reveals. For instance, non-biblical data is for understanding the issues of modern times including society and culture today, in relation to how people live in such a time. On the other hand, ethics from the biblical communities are not, and cannot have the same connotations and implications to Christian ethics today. The reason and fact is because the Bible is somehow formative and normative for Christian ethics. In actuality, this is because humans are historical beings, who occupy a certain time and place within a given space. Therefore the relationship of Scripture and ethics in the contemporary community of faith must understand Christian ethics and address them accordingly, in which the study will attempt to do.

Fundamentally, the Bible does rightfully have a place of privilege and honor in doing Christian ethics, not only just for its moral instructions, but additionally for providing an appreciation of the communal life of the early Christians, and their theological explorations, and high-spirited, sense of power, and presence of Jesus our Lord and Savior. In essence, while the Bible is more than just a list of “dos” and

⁹⁴ Bruce C. Birch and Larry L. Rasmussen, *Bible and Ethics in the Christian Life* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Press, 1976), 1-3.

“don’ts;” it gives us detailed instructions on how we should live and treat others from a moral and ethical perspective.⁹⁵ Even in this context, the Bible does not explicitly cover every situation and ethical dilemma faith communities will face in our lives. For instance, the absence of biblical edification on moral issues such as premarital sex is problematic if one depends upon the Bible alone (*sola scriptura*) for guidance.

Down through the centuries, but especially today, Christians have encountered quandaries to which the Bible provides no answers on many moral issues. Another example is that the Bible does not instruct Christians on the use of illegal or legal drugs. Nevertheless, based on biblical principles people can learn that illegal drugs are wrong and legal drugs have risks and consequences (1Cor. 6:19-20). Also, Brueggemann attested that when Christians become rigid in their ethical beliefs, then their authority of faith is in question. In that context, Christians live unauthorized lives of faith and practice unauthorized ministries.⁹⁶ This radical criticism, allows other moral principles to be utilized in situations where no explicit instructions are present. This ethical reflection must challenge Christian who are exposed to the peril of “cherry picking” those Biblical rules which they find congenial and ignore those they do not find so appealing

Because of these ethical challenges, Christian ministry leaders today who are confronted with moral issues will need to draw upon the best guidance that is found in Jesus’ life, struggles, rejection, radical ministry, and inclusiveness of the marginalized, that gives liberating power of his death and resurrection. Biblical ethics cannot stand alone, but needs to be harnessed with tradition, reason, and the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Because if one should comply with the Bible through dutiousness, or self-control,

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 2.

then one would have to depend upon their moral wisdom, embedded cultural environment, and the Church's systematic notions, predicated upon reason, guidance of the Holy Spirit and their obligation to love God through his son Jesus Christ.

Defining Morality

Correspondingly, from a Christian ethical perspective the question to ask is, what is morality as it relates to premarital sex? Well, in theorizing and reflecting upon Scriptures, morality in a basic sense would be predicated upon God's laws regarding one's private and public behavior, and how one seeks to live a moral life. Logically, from a moral standpoint, Christians strive to obey the Creator's rules in their personal lives as many biblical prophets/apostles have proclaimed, including the Church Fathers, the Apostle Paul, theologians, and preachers within their traditional biblical understanding of what is right or wrong in time and space. Most prophetically, at the core a greater understanding of morality is based on the lessons taught by Jesus, and by Paul as it relates to a new sexual morality for premarital sex. A major problem with moral behavior is that it is totally inconceivable for human beings to live accordingly to all laws, even though there is a basic understanding of right and wrong, one still cannot be a hundred percent sure how to obey God's laws.

In considering these challenges, the gospels show Jesus engaged with many discussions on God's law in terms of personal morality, with the so-called lawyers (Pharisees, Sadducees); they relentlessly challenged Jesus to interpret laws pertaining to morality. For example: an expert Pharisee asked Jesus, "Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?" (Matt. 22:36). Jesus replied "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind;" which is the first greatest

commandment with morality, followed by the second greatest commandment, “Love your neighbor as yourself” (Matt. 22:37- 40). Further, from a biblical, hermeneutical and theological discourse, viewing premarital sex from a Christian moral perspective Smedes’ theory believes some premarital sexual activity should not be considered as sinful. However, the focus and aim here is not to be the judge and jury, but as prophetic Christian Singles Adult ministry leaders and educators, to overcome the oppressions and stigmas, associated with premarital sex.

Twenty-first century cultural situations pertaining to premarital sex among Christian young adults can draw upon Smedes’ theory on morality for theological and hermeneutical reflections, which is a *prophetic* paradigm approach towards the development of a new sexual morality, to enable young adult’s to develop moral sexual values, rather than imposing and condemning, all premarital sex activity as sinful. First, Smedes contended that, in the face of all this, the church must get to the bottom of true Christian sexual morality.⁹⁷ Seemingly, Christian morality today appears to be the churches systematic set of rules, rooted in Augustine’s distorted view of sex and human sexuality. As such, if that is really the case within the church today, that anti-sexual approach will not prevent Christian and non-Christian Single Young Adults from having premarital sex. Likewise, if Christians use power and control to shame, judge, and ridicule Christian Singles Young Adults from having premarital sex, to the point where some have attempted suicide, others cut themselves, while a vast number are engaging in unhealthy sexual practices, then the church is in a real moral dilemma. Or perhaps Christians/leaders do not want to address the reality that some of young adults in are

⁹⁷ Lewis C. Smedes, *Sex for Christians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994), 95.

engaging in non-traditional sexual activities, due to their sexual orientation? Then again, a number of young adult participants in the focus group discussions, made it quite clear that if their church leaders/members had a problem with them having premarital sex, or judge their sexual orientation, they would immediately disassociate them self from those churches. The good news is there are many educational resources available including seminars and workshops on biology and psychology in the context of Lesbian, Bisexual, Gay, Transgender, and Queer (LBGTQ).

Additionally, Smedes also asserted that even the average Christians often struggles to integrate sexuality within their faith, and as Christians, we must receive the word of the gospel message as the word of grace and freedom. He further stated that as Christians we must understand that grace is not against nature, but only against distortions of nature. This means grace does not condemn sex and human sexuality, but illuminates both up into the service of God's Spirit that liberates our human sexuality as a power for love.⁹⁸ As it relates to grace in the context of premarital sex, there needs to be a distinction, for the simple fact that a majority of Christians often attempt to mitigate God's grace to a theological simplicity, neglecting the greater spectrum and core essence of God's grace. Perhaps most have heard theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer's expression "cheap grace," asserting that grace is more than just conferring salvation upon humanity in one specific act. Well, it is vital for Christians to understand that grace contains many acts in which God convicts, teaches, strengthens, enlightens, and reveal Himself to humans and grace perpetually continues after salvation is given to humanity.⁹⁹

⁹⁸ Ibid., 61.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 35.

Smede's "Creative Compassion"

Then again, because God's grace is not against nature, but only against the distortions of nature, Smedes opens the door for the permissibility, virtue and goodness for premarital sex. His creative compassion, by means of grace, gives us insights into the person's unique situation and their character, something that moral principle would tell us is an improper thing to do. Smedes then opens the door for our consideration and imagination of such situation stating that:

Unmarried people who do have sexual intercourse do it for different reasons, with differing motives, and under differing circumstances. Compassion sees these differences. Compassion does not change the moral principle; nor does it let us predict in advance those unusual situations when unmarried people might properly engage in intercourse. Creative compassion is guided by moral law, but it evaluates people's acts with an understanding born of suffering with them and provides the power for dealing with them redemptively.¹⁰⁰

Likewise, theologian Walter Brueggemann believes compassion constitutes a radical form of criticism, for it announces that someone is hurting and that the hurt cannot be accepted as normal and natural, but as an abnormal and unacceptable condition for humanness.¹⁰¹ The study also believes there is a mutual relationship and interconnected with Smedes "creative compassion" coupled with Aristotle virtue theory that focuses on personal character development.¹⁰² These mutual relationships will enable young adults to develop moral values based on God's *agape* love, commitment, honesty and respect for human dignity, as opposed deontological perspective, which is more concerned with one's duty and obligation in the Church.

¹⁰⁰ Smedes, *Sex for Christians*, 126.

¹⁰¹ Walter Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978), 13.

¹⁰² J. Phillip Wogaman, *Christian Ethics: A Historical Introduction* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011), 90-91.

By contrast, from a deontological perspective, morality, coupled with creative compassion and virtue would have no merits, for the laws or rules cannot be changed according to this approach. In essence, morality, coupled with creative compassion and virtue theory is more focused upon our finite human conditions, in which premarital sex takes place, but must also be immersed in God's *agape* love, mutual respect, trust, human dignity, friendship, and life sharing for one another. At the core, for premarital sex to be a sexual morality, it must be anchored with *agape* love, and both people involved should be able to talk freely, honestly, and reason, discuss and reflect on the moral good, responsibility, accountability, consequences, risks, and should not under any circumstances use each other for sexual gratification, but deeply wounded and grounded in God's *agape* love, compassion, humility, and mutual respect and dignity.

The author has defended and justified the arguments set forth in this study, asserting and affirming the needs and relevance for a new sexual morality for premarital sex for 21st century young adults. By means of grace this new sexual morality for premarital sex should be extended to unmarried couples regardless of race, sexual orientation, ethnicity, and those who sit at the margin between the pain of sexual needs, including couples who wrestle with shame, guilt, and ridicule because they have disregarded traditional laws in pursuit of happiness, with their God-given gift of sex and human sexuality. If Christians love God, love self and love others, morality will guide God's laws for a new sexual morality for premarital sexual behavior. For to live based on God's two greatest commandments will absolutely and perfectly demonstrate the core essences of God's *agape* love for humanity and our earnest desires to love God based on our moral life. Lastly, the aim is, to find freedom within moral boundaries while

encouraging one to critically think about their own sexual experience within a Christian framework that seeks sexual justice and human dignity and freedom for all Christian and non-Christian unmarried individuals, as their faith strive to seek understanding of God's mysterious gift of sex and human sexuality

CHAPTER 11 EVALUATION

The overall demonstration research project evaluation consisted of observations, questionnaires and interviews and focus group participant personal presentations. The method used to evaluate LPC congregation and team members/leaders growth includes:

Observations

During the course of the research process the LPC members were very supportive. In many ways the members offered their services/gifts and invited friends and families to the events such as the preaching sermons on the “Great Commission” (Part I and II) that challenged congregants and reminded them, that we are all commissioned to participate in spreading the good news of the gospel message within our communities (see Appendix E). Many members also commented that they enjoyed the interactive worship service which included all ages with various types of participation, including the message of the sermons. The observance of “Domestic Violence Awareness” (see Appendix F) was observed during the entire month of October 2015. Each Sunday during the month of October, we educated the congregation on the facts and realities of domestic violence (DV) with an insert in the bulletin. Members of the congregation including visitors also shared a variety of experiences with DV. Leading up to LPC “Domestic Violence Awareness” service that took place on October 18, 2015, a number of members rallied around to post announcements on social media and LPC web page. The children in our Sunday Church School made posters of DV, from their perspectives, while others

contributed and participated in their own special way. The adolescents and young adults distributed posters and information on DV, and they were a part of the panel forum discussions.

One member in particular contacted the Linden Police Department, requesting guest speakers to join our after-worship fellowship time DV panel forum discussions. We were privileged and honored to have the participations of guest speakers Lieutenant Bara and Sergeant Struszczyk (Linden, NJ Police Department), who shared with us their experiences with DV, including what LPC and members can do to protect themselves and others. Overall the experience provided LPC members and friends an opportunity to talk about different types of unhealthy sexual behaviors and relationships. Many members and visitors also expressed that the events were informative, transformative, and a great experience for them and in the life of LPC, which they will always remember as their first DVA service and forum panel discussions. In addition, LPC member and visitors were given a brief questionnaire to provide feedbacks and comments (see Appendix F).

Site-Team Members – Our first kick-off meeting was well-attended, everyone seemed to be interested and offered their support and expertise in different areas of the project. Unfortunately, due to time constraints and members availability the project was unable to provide leader training in support of the project. Nevertheless, based on their interactions and participations throughout the phase of the research project, the site team members provided their feedbacks and comment.

Sample Focus Group

The focus group participants were a great interactive group. The group consisted of 9 participants and they all committed to attend the discussion sessions. The overall experience was rich and very emotional and transformative in some many ways. In particular, they all enjoyed the discussions topics and questions because most of our discussions session lasted for 2-3 hours. This showed how engaging and comfortable they were and they wanted to share so much of their experience, which was a blessing for me. I must also commend this great group for the openness, courage, trust, vulnerability, and transparency they all exhibited including the way in which they conducted themselves. In our last discussion session each participants shared their overall experiences, feedback, comments and suggestions in a personal presentation in Appendix C and D. Additionally, these comments were taken from their evaluation form in their own words:

I hope more people have the opportunity to do something like this, because I think it would be beneficial to people my age.

I liked how open & honest we were able to be regarding the topic.

Very engaging and comfortable. Can talk about anything.

Strong group bonding, made for an excellent environment; loved it!

I would love to do this again, with new discussion topics.

This was a very fun focus group! I really enjoyed myself and learned a lot.

More profoundly, the focus group participants showed interest to meet as a group in the months ahead offered some rather interesting topics they would like to discuss as follows:

- Depression, Loneliness, Suicidal Thoughts
- Toxic Relationships/Friendships, and the effects they have on you
- Communicating with God and finding His answer
- Cheating/Adultery, how people deal with the end of a relationship/marriage, due to these things
- Managing time and money
- Double Standards
- Grades, school, procrastination, will power, self-discipline
- What is true love, and how do you know when you've found it?
- Sexuality and Gender Orientation
- Distant relationships within a family
- The importance and/or necessity of marriage
- When you're in a storm, what's the best thing you can do to stay strong?
- "Daddy Issues"
- Proper way to empower yourself/others
- How past relationships affect us today (i.e. bullying, friends/enemies etc.)
- What's considered a 'serious' relationship, young proposals?
- Dealing with trust issues, recovering from past relationships
- Maintaining happiness/joy and finding inner peace
- Working yourself down, working too much, self-harm
- Going to a church that has a different religion than you
- Free will vs. Predestination
- Equal Rights, Actual sexuality (LGBTQ), Social Media, (stress, depression, anxiety) can be all one day. Grudges/forgiveness, school stress, feminism, sexualization of clothing on people.
- Friends with Benefits

- Thoughts of kids before marriage and how parents would react if you told them you were? Thoughts on abusive relationship. What do you think an abusive relationship is? Do you think the relationship can be fixed?

This suggested that the participants grew to a level of openness and felt safe and comfortable to discuss topics, they would not have thought to do in a regular church environment. I truly believe the “Sex Talk Table Forum” dialogue concept provided them an opportunity to be themselves and share their voices. Therefore, the pedagogical aim was to motivate, inspire, and educate young adults, enabling them to grow, develop and be transformed as well as, to give hope, affirmation, and support, allowing the Holy Spirit to guide their hearts always, which was accomplished.

Critical Self-Assessment

This was one of the most difficult tasks for me, because I am always very critical of myself. In my humble conscious opinion, overall, I think I did a phenomenal job. Of course, as this is my first research study, I believe I was overly detailed in my initial proposal, which made the research task challenging, and was not able to execute some of the objective goals. There were times that I doubted myself, and times when I became so overwhelmed, and that was when God stepped in and carried me through. I have also learned to embrace and reflect upon the many unexpected surprising positive comments and encouragements, which in return gave me the strength to complete this transformative research journey. At the same time, it was difficult to take the criticisms, biases and personal attacks from a particular member who did not support the objective of the project. These experiences challenged but more importantly it strengthened my leadership competency. In all honesty, I had no intentions of interacting with young adults, but I do believe this was God’s will, and I am so thankful and grateful that I was

able to impact their lives in many special ways. Indeed, it was an emotionally, teary, and transformative experience for me, that God allowed these young adults to share their inner most fears, brokenness, guilt, shame, and sexual experiences with me, without feelings of judgment and alienation. These are the experiences that will anchor me and enabled me to walk in humbleness and humility in future ministry.

CHAPTER 12

MINISTERIAL COMPETENCIES

In support of this demonstration project and preparation for future ministry, I have taken the necessary steps to develop my ministerial competencies skills in the following areas:

Spiritual Discipline

Spiritual discipline is a natural component of the Christian life, which enable a person to produce or develop specific characteristics of their behavior to strengthen their spiritual growth that enables them to grow and become spiritually mature. In particular, this demonstration project has enabled and allowed me to share my faith with people of all faiths, including non-believers, who might not share my theological views. In the process the discipline I practice is learning to embrace different theological views that may differ from my views, with the intentionality to seek and find common ground where believers/non-believers all can share and express the goodness of God in both our lives with authenticity, humbleness, and mutual respect for others. Another spiritual practice for me is learning not to be judgmental based upon my own beliefs, cultural/generational upbringings, biblical interpretations and theological education. As a Christian ministry leader, I strive to be open and listen to the Holy Spirit who redirects my thoughts and actions to meet others at their starting point and social location, remembering how I started on my quest and spiritual journey. One important spiritual practice and discipline for me is as a critical conscious awareness is to deeply reflect, take time to listen and process thoughts and feelings before I react. In order to achieve this, I try to be in

dialogue with others and stay steadfast in prayer and meditating on God's Words, especially in the overall process of this demonstration project and future endeavors. I do admit it is a challenge at times to be still and listen to what God is saying to me.

Leadership Development Skills

As I have come to the realization that leadership is not about one's personality, but more about one's behaviors, which are observable skills and the ability to develop them. Therefore I have identified 5 models of my leadership development practices in support of my research project:

Modeling the Way – I have learned to strive in order to establish principles concerning people's situations and the ways in which I treat others, as mentioned in my spiritual development.

Inspire a Shared Vision – As a leader I have learned ways to passionately tried to inspire others by equipping, empowering, encouraging them to become partners with my vision and call to ministry set forth in my research. More importantly I learned how to give a fresh perspective to others in order to envision what the mission/vision can become in the lives of others, with enthusiastic possibilities for the future.

Challenge the Process – With this shared vision, as a leader I learned how to seek opportunities to change the status quo related to sex and human sexuality in the context of premarital sex. By doing this I took risks to find innovative and creative ways to bring awareness, break silence and develop practical, logical, theological framework to complete my project. Nevertheless, I had to also learn from my mistakes, failures and accept the inevitable disappointments as learning opportunities.

Enable Others to Act and Speak – I have also learned to foster a collaborative effort to build teamwork, with mutual respect and strive to create a safe place for dialogues with an atmosphere of trust, respect and human dignity, made others feel comfortable to express themselves and give voice to the voiceless.

Give Hope and Encouragement – Accomplishing this challenging demonstration project was hard work coupled with determination. In the process I have learned in many ways to recognize the many contributions that others have made to complete the process. To show my gratefulness and appreciation, I have learned how to share my accomplishments and appropriately award the efforts, by making sure those involved celebrate the overall success. More importantly, I intentionally took the initiative to honor and make others feel like heroes, and give words of encouragement and hopefulness.

Administrator

The ability to define and analyze a task or problem effectively and clearly, establish concrete and realistic goals, develop strategies which flow out of these goals and initiate a clear process of evaluation. Also, being able to communicate a sense of mission which sees each task as part of the whole life of the congregation and establishes a collegial environment in which the gifts of others are expressed. The following tasks were demonstrated throughout the events of the demonstration project and the outcomes are reflected in the project evaluations.

Financial Management

I was able to demonstrate my understanding of financial matters as it relates to the successful implementation and sustenance of the community outreach interactive “Table Talk Forum” ministry, and other events in support of the project.

Technology/Social Media Management

The implementation of the “Sex Table Talk Forum” was a success, including video/film editing, media networking, tweets and blogs were technology skills I have acquired and utilized within the implementation process of the research process. Other

areas such as: designing webpages, produce a mobile app, podcast sermons are areas I am currently learning in order to develop and launch my ministry by midsummer 2016.

Time Management

This was challenging due to the fact that I had limited resources and manpower available to work with; however, I was able to manage my time utilizing the calendar on my iPhone application. In the process, I have also learned how to delegate tasks effectively, with limited resources. Nevertheless, this is an area that needs to be improved to meet the demands in future ministry endeavors.

Self-Care

In all honesty, this aspect of my life has always been a struggle for me. Now that I have completed a major aspect of my theological education, I do understand the importance of self-care and maintaining a balanced physical and emotional health. Firstly, I enjoy exercising so I have committed myself to 3 days a week at the gym along with healthy eating habits for my overall health. Secondly, I am getting sufficient sleep, while taking the time spend quality time with family and friend, including fellowshiping with friends and seminarian colleagues to share our stories and spiritual journey.

CONCLUSION

The society and culture in which Christian and non-Christian, college-age, young adults live today in the 21st century is not an easy one. The Millennial Generation or emerging adults are expected to be all things to all people, while they are struggling to understand who they are, and the challenges related to sex and human sexuality in the context of premarital sex. As a generational cohort, they often battle the stereotypes of being called lazy, narcissistic, Generation Me, entitled and ungrateful. Most importantly, they are searching for something deeper, while grasping for truth as they emerged into adulthood. The fact and reality is that a great number of our emerging adults have had sex since they were adolescents, and are still engaging in sexual activities. In the same manner, many college young adults are “hooking up,” have “friends with benefits,” which entails casual consensual sex that has no form of emotional connection or relationship commitment. Most disturbing is that a vast majority of young adults admit they are highly influenced by popular contemporary culture and society, which has become their dominant source of sex education. At the core, within these cultural contexts, the young adults are not properly informed and lack sex education from a practical, biblical, and theological reasoning perspective.

In view of these cultural shifts and shocking realities, a majority of churches today lack cultural intelligence, and have not made a strong sociological cases, which proves contemporary popular culture distorted portrayals of God’s good gift of sex, is immoral, meaningless, and very destructive in the development of our young adults. On

the other hand, parents and faith communities often face the challenges in understanding, connecting and providing biblical, theological, spiritual and moral guidance on sex and sexuality, among young adults in their homes and faith communities. It must also be clear that the study is not implying that parents and faith communities should encourage young adults to engage in premarital sex, but to help young adults to develop a new sexual morality approach toward premarital sex. In the same breath, we need to be honest and face the fact that a majority of young adults are and will engage in sexual activity for the wrong reasons. However, we believe some premarital sexual situations should not be viewed from a moral absolute perspective, but from a moral integrity standpoint, anchored and immersed in *agape* love, respect, faithfulness, commitment and dignity for each other that honors God, which ultimately lead to marriage, where sex is a skill best learned. Likewise, when moral virtues are not present in any relationship or marriage, then sex would be considered wrong and immoral.

More importantly, parents and churches are the two primary socializing agents, who can still have a positive influence in the lives of young adults. Therefore, both parents and faith communities must find mutual ground and work together for the sake of our young adults. In achieving this task, faith communities can no longer create a culture of silence and negativity regarding sexual matters. As a result, the church's culture of silence only prevents parents and faith believers from talking openly to their children about God's good gift of sex. In actuality, the mere fact that virtually every religious tradition affirms God's good gift of sex, is a good affirmative reason why religious community leaders should break the culture of silence and speak positively and affirmatively about sex and human sexuality. God is a liberator, and the time is now to

liberate God's people, particularly our young adults who lack knowledge and understanding of their God-given gift of sex. As Christian leaders/educators we can no longer impose embedded biblical ideologies or follow the path of "cheap justice" without engaging in a self-critical assessment of one's own power, privilege, and resources. That kind of deontological approach does not solve the root of the moral issues we are facing in our society and culture today. Instead, we must implement methods to guide, and inspire the *telos*, so that Christian Singles Young Adults can become responsible, and be transformed as a part of their human experiences. Therefore, for these reasons and as a critical conscious awareness, the study concludes by offering a few suggestions on how faith communities and parents can partnership together; to provide a hermeneutical space for "Sex Talk Table Forum" dialogues within their communities, where biblical, theological reasoning and understanding of sex and sexuality is facilitated for young adults. It is crucially important to give them a space at the table, with alternative voices that seeks affirmation, guidance and understanding of their God given gift of sex and human sexuality can be heard, and valued in space and time.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A
DEMONSTRATION PROJECT PROPOSAL

LET'S TALK SEX
PEDAGOGY OF HUMAN SEXUALITY AND SEX FOR
CHURCHED AND UNCHURCHED SINGLE ADULTS

By

INGRID A. SINGH

DEMONSTRATION PROJECT PROPOSAL

March 7, 2015

Challenge Statement

Living in a sex saturated culture and society today, when sex is one of the most misunderstood and misinterpreted topics, is a paradox in the 21st Century. For this reason, as Prophetic Singles Adult Ministry leader, and a member of the Linden Presbyterian Church, Linden NJ, this demonstration project will develop a community outreach interactive “Table Talk Forum” for heterosexual Churched and Unchurched Single Adults who seek biblical/theological understanding, guidance and affirmation, regarding their God given human sexuality, to inform healthy choices in sexual behaviors.

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INTRODUCTION

THE AUTHOR'S EXPERIENCE AND BACKGROUND

In retrospect, it was during the 1960s and 1970s, the secret was let out that sex could be an end in and of itself without reproductive considerations. By the 1980s my Generation X was hit hard with sex on television, movies, and internet, which was not even possible for me to watch, growing up in the beautiful island of Jamaica, West Indies, where I was born. I was raised in a Christian single family household by my beloved grandmother, with three older brothers and younger sister. Evidently, my mother was a young single adult, who was not able to raise her five children; and as a result, we were all raised by our grandparents. My family's socio-economic status was borderline average; in other words, my beloved grandmother was not educated, but it was her strong faith and trust in God, coupled with the help of my mother, which allowed her to keep a roof over our heads. Growing up in Kingston, Jamaica, life was very challenging due to the oppressive political, socio-economic, and cultural government systems, which kept the people and country in a state of bondage and instability. In spite of these socially and culturally oppressive challenges, it was my beloved grandmother's strong faith in God, and profound religious/spiritual beliefs, which enabled her to instill moral values and Christian beliefs in our household.

In addition, by means of grace, I was privileged to attend a Catholic School, even though my family's Christian beliefs were rooted in the Baptist traditions. Nevertheless,

there were no efforts, support, guidelines and teachings on the topic of sex within the church. As I recall, the only awareness or information I received as a young teen, concerning sex, was channeled through the media, movies and pop music, which was the core of the Jamaican pop culture. As a result I have seen many young teen girls including my friends from school became prematurely engaged in premarital sex. I am of course no exception, because my adolescent years were full of bad judgment. Considering all these factors, and the lack of education and guidance on sex, I became a young, teen, single mother. It was in this context that my sexual identity was developed, which subsequently informed my moral value systems and sexual decisions. I chose to keep my baby and gave birth to my only precious loving son in 1983. Introspectively, as I reflect deeply into my adolescent life experiences, I realized how difficult it must have been for my beloved grandmother and mother to provide biblical guidance or engage in a conversation with me about God's gift and purpose for sex. In reality, and by its own nature, being a single teen parent was very challenging for me. Nevertheless, in all humbleness and gratitude, I thank God for His grace, coupled with the love and support of my beloved grandmother and mother who provided a loving, nurturing and stable environment for my son.

As I reflect upon my past life experiences, I see myself as a product or footprints of an unintentional generational cycle, coupled with an oppressive religious, political, social environment and government systems, which kept me and my family in bondage. Unequivocally, it was our trials, tribulations, faith, prayers, and God's promises, that have set us free from bondage; and I truly believe who the Son sets free are truly free indeed. By the year 1990, God answered our prayers when my family migrated to the United States of America, in search of a new beginning, with great hopes and high

expectations. In the interim, that blessing came with feelings of betrayal when I often think of those we had to leave behind due to financial, immigration, and socio-economic status. Still and all, I am profoundly grateful for the opportunity and sacrifice my mother made by migrating to the U. S.; and I consider the opportunity as a legacy and inheritance she gave to her children and grandchildren. With this new life, I was able to establish a great, loving, motherly relationship and memorable life with my dear beloved mother, which I will always cherish. I am forever most thankful for the profound Godly life she lived and the encouragement she gave to her children and grandchildren, to trust and honor God always.

Over the years, the Lord has graciously provided, for me and my son, who has been married for the past two years. However, somehow I must confess that the aftermath of my past naive sexual experience as a young teen, left me with a feeling of shame, failure, humiliation, and depression, struggling to understand “who am I, and what is my created purpose on earth?” As the years progressed, in 1995 I accepted the Lord as my personal Savior, and became a member of Union Baptist Church, Montclair, NJ. Thereafter, it took a series of roller coaster events in my life, only for me to realize how much I have compromised my hopes, moral and ethical values as a woman of God. This theological reflection revealed to me the words of the Apostle Paul:

What I don't understand about myself is that I decide one way, but then I act another, doing things I absolutely despise. So if I can't be trusted to figure out what is best for myself, and then do it, it becomes obvious that God's command is necessary. But I need something more! For if I know the law but still can't keep it, and if the power of sin within me keeps sabotaging my best intentions, I obviously need help! (Romans 7:15-17, The Message Bible).

In essence, this critical, conscious awareness brought me to a pivotal turning point of my life, which led me on a quest, as my faith begun to seek understanding of my

created purpose. It was God's grace, mercy, forgiveness and love that took me on a spiritual journey in 2004, while attending a Bible study series with a focus on Rick Warren's book titled *A Purpose-Driven Life*. This Bible study series helped me to understand God's purpose and will for my life, and most importantly that life is not about me. A few years later in 2006, something spectacular happened in my life; the Lord spoke to me in a vision and told me that, He is going to use me, just as I am, to bring the Good News to marginalized single adults. My heart was filled with joy, knowing God would use a broken vessel like me to transform the lives of others. I shared the good news with my former pastor at Union Baptist Church, who prayed with me and encouraged me to obtain a theological education in ministry at New York Theological Seminary. In the process of obtaining a Master of Divinity and a Master of Arts in Religious Education degrees, God's love, mercy, grace and forgiveness led me to develop a Prophetic Single Adults Ministry at Union Baptist Church in 2008, which provided essential biblical foundational principles in the lives of single adults. The Prophetic Single Adults Ministry became very fruitful and served as a positive influence in the lives of single adults within the church and surrounding communities. It was in 2011, during my employment at Robert Wood Johnson University Hospital, Rahway NJ, I met Reverend Dr. William C. Weaver, who served as the former Director of Pastoral Care at Rahway Hospital. I initially expressed interest in a volunteer chaplaincy and was offered the opportunity to serve in that capacity. While working with Dr. Weaver, I admired his work ethic and pastoral leadership, and expressed my desire to work with him during the course of my seminary internship. He delightfully afforded the privilege and opportunity to engage in a wide capacity of ministry, as a part of my theological seminary internship at the Linden

Presbyterian Church, Linden NJ. With steadfast prayers, discernments and spiritual guidance, I felt compelled to respectively resign as the president and leader of the Prophetic Single Adults Ministry I started at Union Baptist Church. This was very difficult for me because of the passion and commitment I have for the members in the group. I also felt a feeling of betrayal, failure and sadness deep within my soul, but the words of the Apostle Paul, taught me a valuable lesson in ministry and leadership:

What, after all, is Apollos? And what is Paul? Only servants, through whom you came to believe as the Lord has assigned to each his task. I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God has been making it grow. So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow. The one who plants and the one who waters have one purpose, and they will each be rewarded according to their own labor. For we are co-workers in God's service; you are God's field, God's building (1 Corinthians 3: 5-9 NIV).

Not long after, I became a member of the LPC family, where I am currently involved in many aspects of ministry. However, I could not ignore the earnest burning desire, love, passion and commitment to complete the mission and task the Lord had bestowed upon me in a vision. In truth, I believe my personal experiences, conversions, and transformation have prepared me to further understand and fulfill my call to ministry, as it relates to the challenges and ambiguities the Churched and Unchurched Single Adults wrestles with, as it relates to human sexuality and premarital sex in the 21st Century.

Theologically, I believe I have overcome being a product of an inherited cultural and generational oppressive cycle that historically has dehumanized, ostracized, and devalued the very existence of human sexuality in our church and society. Today, I live unapologetically out of my own particular story, for I have grown spiritually by means of grace, to overcome the oppression and stigma associated with being single and having

premarital sex, to a better understanding of God's created purpose in my life. This transformative realization has enabled me to embrace and accept my God-given human sexuality as a gift from God. Therefore, as a proud Christian single adult mother, I no longer feel shame or guilt, nor need to defend my social location. As a theologian, I believe that the Christian faith and the life I am called to live make me a worthy witness and faithful servant for the Lord.

With all due respect, this Doctor of Ministry demonstration project is not only an academic study; but because of my past experiences, commitment, and passion for single adults, I consider myself a part of the problem and solution. It is, therefore, vitally important to understand the tasks and challenges in becoming an efficient and effective transformative leader. So, I embark upon this challenging journey humbly and authentically with the intention to fulfill God's Great Commission for the building of God's kingdom.

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION TO THE SETTING

“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the LORD, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future” (Jeremiah 29:11 NIV).

I believe it was faith, obedience and God’s will that brought me to the Linden Presbyterian Church (I.P.C) in Linden, New Jersey. The Linden Presbyterian Church began in 1927, when the farsighted Trustees of the Elizabeth Presbytery purchased a plot of ground in the city of Linden with the hope of erecting a church in the future at a site located in a development known as Sunnyside Gardens. Almost a decade later, in 1936, it was the Second Presbyterian Church of Elizabeth that secured permission from the Elizabeth Presbytery to start a mission in Linden. In the development process, ongoing meetings were held in a little building known as the Suburban Club in Berlant Park, but were discontinued after two years. Thereafter, in October 1939 the Presbytery secured the services of Mr. James L. Ewalt, a senior classman and Mr. William H. Felmeth, a junior classman from Princeton Theological Seminary to make a second attempt at starting a mission church. The first meeting was held on November 5, 1939 at the Skating House in Woodrow Wilson Park with 34 persons present. This new organization was called the Linden Community Chapel, and in December 1939 it received a gift of \$130.00 to start a building fund. During the first five months in 1940, a canvassing committee obtained pledges which resulted in the contribution of \$481.00. The Mother Church (Second Presbyterian of Elizabeth) that initially secured permission from the Elizabeth Presbytery

to start a mission in Linden doubled the fund by contributing \$627.00. By June of 1940, the Reverend James L. Ewalt became the Assistant Pastor of the Second Presbyterian Church of Elizabeth, and was also in charge of the Linden Community Chapel. On September 11, 1940, a contract was awarded and a building was constructed at the rear of the purchased site, located on the corner of Orchard Terrace and Princeton Road.

The new building was dedicated on February 2, 1941, and the Service of Organization of a Church was held on March 11, 1941 where 38 persons were received. In the process, the following: John Crowe, William Pullen and Arthur Pritchard were elected as Elders including, and Andrew Schulze, Martin Norr, Rudolph Hess, John Potter and Wilbur Piper as Trustees. The church grew by leaps and bounds, and by the end of the first year, there were 160 members and 174 pupils in the Sunday Church School. Not long afterwards, the pastor, Reverend Ewalt heard his country's call to enter the military chaplaincy, and requested to dissolve his pastoral duties on May 4, 1943. On November 16, 1943, the Reverend Kenneth E. Walter was extended a unanimous call, and was installed as the new Pastor. Under the pastoral leadership of Reverend Walter, it was decided that a manse was needed, and with fear and trembling, the congregation took a leap of faith and undertook the mortgage. Amazingly, the membership almost doubled during the five-year period between 1944 and 1949, and the manse mortgage was burned on Sunday, January 30, 1949, which was the fifth anniversary of the Forward Movement campaign. Work started on a new building on September 1, 1949, and the ground was officially broken on Rally Day September 25, 1949. The Cornerstone Laying commemorated the tenth anniversary of the first meeting of the congregation in the Skating House at Wilson Park, November 5, 1939. The Sanctuary was completed in time

to hold the first meeting on Children's Day, June 11, 1950. The congregation began to worship regularly in the Sanctuary on Christian Home Sunday, October 16, 1950. The dedication of the Sanctuary was held in observance of the tenth anniversary of the organization of the Linden Presbyterian Church (LPC) on Sunday, March 11, 1951.

By 1963 the church experienced a substantial membership growth of almost 800 members, which led to the calling of an assistant pastor, the Reverend Tony M. MacNaughton, who was installed on September 10, 1967. The Reverend MacNaughton served for five years, and in March of 1971, he was called to pastor the Hildale Park Church.

As LPC approached its thirtieth anniversary, it began to face problems relating to an aging congregation, for as members grew older, vast numbers of young people moved away. An aging congregation and ministry were made clear when LPC senior pastor the Reverend Kenneth E. Walter answered the Master's final call on Memorial Day, May 30, 1978. The death of Reverend Walter was devastating to this new community of faith believers, who had come to know him as their under-shepherd and long-time friend, but it had to take the reins and continue to fulfill its mission for the building of God's kingdom. In the process of coping with difficulties and uncertainties, LPC was blessed with a new pastor when, on September 19, 1979, the Reverend Dr. William C. Weaver was installed as the third pastor of the LPC congregation, and continues to serve the as Senior Pastor.¹

Linden Presbyterian Church Mission and Perspectives

The Reverend Dr. William C. Weaver has been the pastor of LPC since September of 1979. As a Church family, the congregation strives to be one body in

¹ Linden Presbyterian Church, Church Archives.

Christ, because they view themselves as God's children, fellowshiping, and working together as Christian witnesses to serve and build God's kingdom here on earth. The LPC community of faith believers is a beautiful blended family, with approximately 95% of their congregation is Caucasian, and 5% are African Americans, and they all represents different ethnicities and ages. They lovingly and passionately consider themselves as Christian brothers and sisters sharing their gifts, and blessings to address the spiritual, emotional, and physical needs of those who pass through their doors including those who live in the communities around them. In the same manner, the congregation is intentional to touch the lives of Christians and non-Christians beyond their geographical area and throughout the world. Most importantly, they live by faith and are guided by the Scriptures, and because of this belief, their mission and ministry continues to grow and touched those who struggle to understand God's will and God's way. Similarly, the LPC family believes in the church's mission, purpose, and ministry, as it relates to serving and providing programs that meets the spiritual needs of their family, friends, and visitors for the building of God's kingdom.

Linden Presbyterian Church Governance

The Session is the ruling body of the LPC congregation church, with the Pastor serving as moderator and council presides over the session. They are responsible for measuring the spiritual life and work of the LPC congregation. In other words, the session's goal is to make decisions that are beneficial, and impactful LPC members and the surrounding community. Accordingly, the Office of Deacons is responsible for practical matters and administers the welfare of the congregation. The deacons oversee several areas of worship and service, including Communion, Nursery, Flowers,

Fellowship, and Baptism. Also, they keep in touch with our college students and service personnel through cards and letters, making sure our young people are aware of camp and conference opportunities available to them.

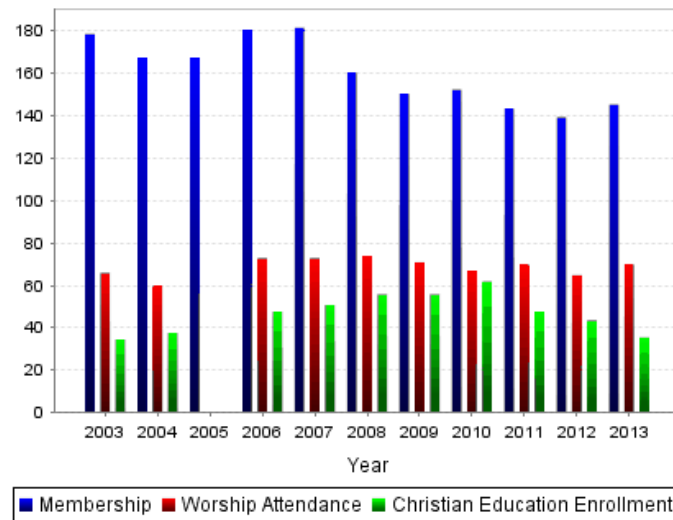
Additionally, the Ruling Elders serves to discern and measure the congregation's fidelity to the Word of God, and to strengthen and nurture LPC faith in the life of the church. However, they are not called "ruling" because of their role in governance, but because they are persons chosen from the LPC congregation and are ordained to serve. They work in partnership with teaching elders who strengthen and nurture the faith and life of the congregation through their leadership and service. Within their calling, ruling elders have responsibilities in the life of the church in areas of leadership, governance, spiritual discernment, and discipline. In the process of serving in these capacities, the ruling elders have an opportunity to reflect upon how their responsibilities are lived out or exemplify in their lives. Lastly, LPC has a separate board of management or trustees, who administers other material business aspects of the congregation, such as its endowments, salaries and buildings.

Linden Presbyterian Church Accomplishments

As a church community, we strive to develop our spiritual gifts, and make disciples of others to fulfill our mission for the building of God's kingdom. One of our finest achievements is the LPC Mission Project, which has been feeding many families in our community and nearby towns for 34 years. We supply 1,000 meals each month, with sufficient food for 3 meals a day for 3 days. Currently we are now serving 30 families a month, and the children of the families were also given Christmas gifts. There is also the "Presbyterian Women", who have been serving for 30 years, who graciously and

continually improve the life of the church, and have hosted many events such as “Tea with Santa,” boutiques, annual women’s luncheon/dinner, spring cleaning and they are committed to supporting and serving LPC Mission Project. There are many other committees and ministries within our church that all work together for the building of God’s kingdom.

Overall, my experience at Linden Presbyterian Church has been welcoming, spiritual and memorable, because I felt honored to have the most wonderful group of faith believers, who embraced, nurtured, and allowed me to serve authentically in a wide capacity of ministry. Moreover, I was profoundly blessed with the pastoral leadership of my pastor Rev .Dr. William C. Weaver, who is a faithful follower of Christ and who leads by example. In the process of my internship and ministerial involvement at LPC, I was able to discover and develop my spiritual gifts, pastoral formation/competence and personal development, which has enabled me to grow spiritually in God’s call to a prophetic ministry of reconciliation, justice, evangelism and transformation. Beyond my transformative spiritual growth development, and the positive attributes and leadership perspectives of LPC, I became aware that our church membership has dramatically declined over a ten year period, reported by the Presbyterian Church (USA) in Figure 1.



**Figure 1 LPC Membership,
Worship Attendance & Christian Education Enrollment**

The chart above shows that in 2013 LPC reported a total overall membership of 145, an average worship attendance of 70 and our enrollment in Christian education was 35. In actuality, LPC 2013 annual church report shows a decline, which reflects overall membership of 139, an average worship attendance of 68, and our enrollment in Christian education was 28. As a comparative analysis, in our 2014 annual church report, it was reported that our overall membership was 145, an average worship attendance of 63, and our Christian education enrollment was 20, with an average attendance of 15. Not only are we struggling in terms of church growth, but also from a financial standpoint, which points us to the reality that suggest merging with another church or closing the doors of Christ's church. Evidently as a congregation we have not grown as a church, which is disturbing and frustrating as a member.

Similarly, the Presbyterian Church (USA) has also reported that they led the greatest membership drop—down 2.6%, and is now the 25th largest denomination.² In reality, the decline in church membership is not a new phenomenon, for over the decades many religious institutions are being forced to close their places of worship. However, the paradox of this phenomenon is while many of our mainstream churches are being forced to close, due to the dramatic decline in church growth, research shows that there is a missing generational cohort underrepresented in many of our churches today.³ From a church analysis and observational viewpoint, the LPC have experienced a plateau in church growth, due to an aging congregation, and the fact that as a majority of members grew older, a vast number of young people moved away. In the interim, Dr. William C. Weaver reported our 2014 annual church report that “yes many things have changed over the decades, but others have remained constant – and we have remained constant with them.” He also stated that, “We are a constant witness to the community – a constant presence – through our participation in community organizations and community ministry.”⁴

Indeed, I do agree with Dr. Weaver’s statement, and as a member of LPC, I have learned that they have overcome some embedded traditional perspectives over the years as it relates to worship, preaching, liturgies, and church administration practices. Based on my observation and experiences, I truly believe they are transforming as a church community, for reasons that they were so open and receptive to my contributions, and

² Presbyterian Mission Agency, “All Statistics, Linden NJ, Total Membership,” http://apps.pcusa.org/tenyeartrends/report/4678/all_statistics.jsp (accessed March 14, 2015).

³ George Barna, *Power of Vision* (Ventura, CA: Regal 1992), 2, 9.

⁴ Linden Presbyterian Church, *Annual Report 2014* (Linden, NJ: Linden Presbyterian Church, 2014).

allowed God to use me however he chooses. It is evident that their minds are renewed and they want to do what is good, acceptable, and perfect for the Lord. The fact that they allowed an African-American woman from a Baptist tradition to preach on issues such as racism, sexism, classism and other forms of oppression in a predominantly white congregation, can be viewed as they have reconciled and transformed who they are as a Church on justice. As theologian Walter Brueggemann would describe this transformation as the task of prophetic ministry is to bring the claims of the tradition and situation of enculturation into effective interface, to evoke images of peace, personal and communal wholeness, and social justice.⁵

Dr. Weaver's annual church report statement was very encouraging to hear because as a congregation it gives eschatological hope and motivation to take a step further in ministry. On the other hand, it also suggests that as a congregation we struggle to embrace change, which is inevitable and an ongoing process. As a presupposition based on my ministerial experience and observations, some of the causative factors churches have become stagnant are that there is a generational gap within our mainline churches, which results to an aging congregation, similar to what LPC has been experiencing. Many researchers also believe this trend of non-church growth is evident because many churches today are reluctant or do not know how to address the social, moral and ethical issues affecting the Churched and Unchurched Single Adult population in our society today.

⁵ Walter Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), 41.

New Lens for the Future

Figuratively speaking, it would appear that most churches today are more concerned with systematic catechism, while mitigating the importance of educating, empowering and liberating the community of faith believers in becoming disciples. These theological reflections, also suggest that for LPC to grow and keep the doors of their church open, they need to be intentional to understand and establish a nurturing relationship with this growing population of Churched and Unchurched Single Adults (CUSA), who are underrepresented in the churches. The reality is the churches are at stake today, therefore, they need to refocus their mission by creating or integrating a pedagogical approach, in the process of spiritual formation, to bridge relevant theological reflections and day-to-day experiences, in the lives of CUSA. Therefore, as a Christian, and as a member of the Linden Presbyterian Church, I believe it is my duty to fulfill the Great Commission of our Lord and Savior. The Great Commission in Matthew 20: 18-20, is the last recorded personal instruction given by Jesus to His disciples, commanding them, regardless of their social location, church membership and faith, to go and make disciples of others. In theologizing, as I meditated on the Great Commission Scripture, what captured my attention was the order and process in which Jesus instructed his disciples to make disciples of others.

Firstly, Jesus told his disciples that all authority has been given to him in heaven and on earth. In other words, if anyone questions Jesus' disciples regarding their mission, or call to ministry, we should tell them that the scriptures affirm and assure us that we are all given the permission and authority to fulfill the Great Commission. Jesus said, "Go" and proclaim the good news to the world. The word "go" refers to outreach evangelism,

which is the essential work of the body of Christ followers; therefore, outreach and evangelism is not an option for Christians, but an obligation directed from Christ, to call Christians to make disciples of others.⁶ Most importantly, we all must be reminded that, there are no exceptions in God's Kingdom, because two thousand years ago, the Jews, Gentiles, Samaritans, men, women, children, prostitutes, tax collectors, and Roman Centurions were all, appropriate subjects for evangelistic efforts. The Kingdom of God is inclusive, not exclusive, and our mission is to embrace all those who are spiritually hungry, Churched, Unchurched, married, single, lost, and those who are hurting. Most definitely, the challenge in fulfilling God's Great Commission is that at some point in our lives as leaders, we must come face to face with the moral and ethical issues in life we don't necessarily talk about in church. It was C. S. Lewis who once said that the traditional Christian injunction against premarital sex "is so difficult and so contrary to our instincts that obviously either Christianity is wrong or our sexual instinct, as it is now, has gone wrong."⁷ This theological reflection brings us to a preliminary analysis of the challenge, the demonstration project will attempt to address.

⁶ Kenneth Gentry, Jr., *The Greatness of the Great Commission: The Christian Enterprise in a Fallen World* (Tyler, TX: Institute for Christian Economics, 1990), 58.

⁷ C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: HarperCollins, 2001), 95.

CHAPTER 2

PRELIMINARY ANALYSIS OF THE CHALLENGE

Challenge Statement

Living in a sex saturated culture and society today, when sex is one of the most misunderstood and misinterpreted topics, is a paradox in the 21st Century. For this reason, as Prophetic Singles Adult Ministry leader, and a member of the Linden Presbyterian Church, Linden NJ, this demonstration project will develop a community outreach interactive “Table Talk Forum” for heterosexual Churched and Unchurched Single Adults who seek biblical/theological understanding, guidance and affirmation, regarding their God given human sexuality, to inform healthy choices in sexual behaviors.

Based on the challenge statement, one would ask, what is human sexuality? Well in theory, human sexuality can be defined as the capacity to have erotic experiences and responses. Sexuality can be experienced and expressed in a variety of ways, through one’s thoughts, fantasies, desires, beliefs, attitudes, values, behaviors, practices, roles and relationships. Human sexuality is also an expression of sexual sensation, and intimacy between human beings. Psychologically, sexuality is another way to express the fullness of love between a man and woman; and biologically, it is the process by which a child is conceived. It is also important to know that sexuality also has its social implications, as well as, ramifications. For many reasons, most societies set rules, limitations, through social/cultural norms and even taboos. Moral and religious guidelines are established with legal constraints, on what is considered as permissible sexual behavior.⁸ A very

⁸ Andrew Wilson, ed., *World Scripture: A Comparative Anthology of Sacred Texts* (New York: Paragon House, 1991), 175.

important aspect of sexuality is spiritual, which is a sexual act that involves mutual self-giving, whereas, the spirit of one person relates deeply to the spirit of another. In this process there is a voluntary surrender of self to another through which a larger unity is achieved without the abridgement of freedom. For Christians sexuality is understood as the gift of God and as a dimension through which the love of God and neighbor is expressed. Given these perspectives, then sexuality becomes personal, due to the fact that each person's sexuality is unique, and our sexuality belongs first and foremost to us, because each person is a sexual being in her or his own accordance.⁹

So then, if sexuality is personal, unique and belongs to each person, and is a gift from God, why is the church trying to control human sexuality and sex, by imposing their theological and biblical interpretations as it relates to premarital sex? From a more practical standpoint, the truth of the matter is, not everyone will get married. Therefore, the church's instruction to abstain from sex, and wait indefinitely to experience God's gift of sex, can be very frustrating, burdensome and unimaginable for a majority of Churched and Unchurched Single Adults to cope with. For this reason, I will draw upon theologian and ethicist Lewis Smedes' concept of creative compassion, where Smedes opens the door for the permissibility and goodness of premarital sex, in the context of situational ethics and offers this example:

Two retired people, widowed or divorced, discover their lives enriched and renewed by their love for one another. In their maturity they are capable of a personal relationship in quiet yet exciting depth. They receive from each other a shared intimacy of shared union that is profoundly loving; yet they cannot be married. Creative compassion evaluates these people in the light of their situation, refusing to put them in the same category of unchastity as casual bed-hoppers. Moral law judges that these

⁹ Boston Women's Health Collective, *Our Bodies, Ourselves*, rev. ed. (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1976), 38.

two young people and two elderly people are doing a morally inappropriate thing but compassion recognizes that they are doing it for purposes and with motives that put them in a category different from that of people who use sexual intercourse to dominate or exploit other persons.¹⁰

An important distinction must be made at the outset between sexuality and sex. In essence, sex is not merely a physical act between two people, but incorporates many aspects of the act itself, the process of reproduction and lovemaking. In fact, sex is only a small part of sexuality, and so then sexuality becomes an integrated, individualized, unique personal expression of self. Sex also defines every individual's concept of sexual identity and gender, as male and female, man and woman, or the perceptions of what it is for others to be male and female.¹¹ Intrinsically, sex is a moral act, which involves the body, mind, and spirit.

Human Sexuality and the Early Church

Christianity has had a long history of being extremely negative and condemnatory about sex and this negativity is attributed to the influence of the Early Church Fathers. Fundamentally, the church father who has molded the negative Christian attitudes toward sex more than any other person is Saint Augustine of Hippo. Most noticeably, he was one of the greatest thinkers of Christian antiquity, and in his *Confessions*, he expressed his struggles against carnal pleasures, marriage, and gender. In order to understand Augustine's philosophical views, one must understand the early Church's historical, social and political setting, and how it shaped Augustine's interpretation in Old Testament scriptures. For Augustine, sexuality and gender was viewed through the lens

¹⁰ Lewis Smedes, *Sex for Christians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994), 127–128.

¹¹ Eleanor S. Morrison and Vera Borosage, eds., *Human Sexuality: Contemporary Perspectives* (Palo Alto, California: Mayfield Publishing, 1973), ix.

of Adam and Eve's first sin and disobedience against God. In spite of his belief, he was involved with a woman who was not considered his partner in lawful marriage. According to Augustine, he found her in a state of warding desire, and thought she was the only girl for him and remained faithful to her. Based on that relationship and experience, Augustine claimed to learn the difference between the partnership of marriage for the sake of having a family and mutual consent of love is a matter of physical sex.¹² In those days Christian ethics were very important due to the moral and disciplinary problems that were associated with sexual desires. As a result, the church required Christians to be monogamous and remain faithful to one spouse. It is rather quite interesting that Augustine, who struggled and grappled with such strong sexual desires, could become the most influential writer on Christian sexual ethics in the history of Western Christendom.¹³ In view of Augustine's philosophical viewpoints and struggles with sexual desires, he has overwhelmingly, over the centuries, indoctrinated the negative sexual attitudes, not only of Roman Catholics but also Christians in general, by imposing his biblical interpretations upon Christianity. As Derrick Baily notes, "Augustine must bear no small measure of responsibility for the insinuation into our culture of the idea, still widely current, that Christianity regards sexuality as something peculiarly tainted with evil."¹⁴

¹² Augustine of Hippo, *Confessions*, trans. Henry Chadwick (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), Chap. 7-16.

¹³ Henry Chadwick. *Augustine* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 2, 24.

¹⁴ For a discussion of the attitude toward sex of the early church, including Augustine, see Derrick Sherwin Bailey, *Common Sense About Sexual Ethics: A Christian View* (New York: Macmillan, 1962); Donald F. Winslow, "Sex and Anti-sex in the Early Church Fathers," in *Male and Female: Christian Approaches Sexuality*, eds. Ruth Tiffany Barnhouse and Urban T. Holmes III (New York: Seabury, 1956).

Biblical Understanding of Human Sexuality

The truth of the matter is the subject of sexuality and sex has been thought-provoking and misunderstood topics throughout the centuries. In the interest of this viewpoint, I would like to establish a biblical understanding to mitigate the ideologies and philosophical Bible interpretation in support of this demonstration project. From a biblical perspective, a Christian understanding of our human identity is grounded in the Word of God. In the first two chapters of the Bible we find the answer to the question of human sexuality. Not only is the answer presented as a basic fact of our creation and origins, as human beings, but an elucidation of the nature of sexuality, which is a central part of the of who we are. The core significance of human sexuality is evident in the account of creation in Genesis chapters 1 and 2. Human beings were fashioned by God in His own image, and are created male and female (Genesis 1:27). From the beginning of creation our human sexual identity is reciprocal, meaning one's own human nature is properly understood in complementary relationship to another, who is alike in nature and opposite sexually. Unlike the rest of God's creation, the sexual differences between man and woman are pronounced "very good" (Genesis 1:31), which affirm that human sexuality is a gift of God. By virtue, sexuality is a significant essential attribute of our human nature; but by no means, did our Creator intend it to be the defining characteristic of our humanness.

Nevertheless, this complementary nature of our human sexuality is affirmed again in the second chapter of Genesis, where woman is fashioned out of man (Genesis 3:18-24). In that contextual framework, we gracefully affirm human sexuality to be a gift of God. By God's grace, human sexuality both enriches and fulfills our personhood. In the

same context, as a result of humankind's fall from innocence (Genesis 3), the complementary nature of human sexuality and all other human relationships has been distorted. In truth, Adam and Eve's disobedience did not only lead to death and separation from God our Creator, but it also alienated human beings from one another, and distorts our sexual relationships between man and woman.¹⁵

Human Sexuality and Sex in the 21st Century

As we have discovered that the stigma of human sexuality and sex is certainly not a new historical phenomenon, but somehow, sexual drama has woven its way and pervades the culture and society we live in today. Without a doubt, the media has dominated our culture with the belief that sex sells clothes, cosmetics, books, cars, jobs, homes, and music. God's good purpose for sex has been distorted and misunderstood since the early centuries. Even though sex is a significant part of our human identity and experience, inherently, it would appear that a majority of pastors/religious leaders are not biblically and theologically equipped to speak authentically on the topic, without feeling shame or guilt. For the most part, some pastors often speak of sex negatively even mentioning it as a sin. Regrettably, this approach to human sexuality and sex, often leads to the alienation, and dehumanization of individuals when guiding, counseling or educating congregants on issues related to sex.

As a matter of concern, in the 21st Century, the signs of the time have changed dramatically. As a culture and society, we have experienced the gay and lesbian rights movement, an increased acceptability of premarital sex, cohabitation, divorce, and a more diverse family structure with different values. As a result, many Americans are now

¹⁵ The Alliance, "Human Sexuality," <https://www.cmalliance.org/about/beliefs/perspectives/human-sexuality> (accessed March 15, 2015).

embracing individualistic and nonconformist practices in every cultural and generational cohort of our society. In our society and culture today, we often perceive that it is the younger adult population (millennials) who morally accept premarital sex. Surprisingly, a 2013 Gallup survey reported that Americans aged 55 and older are largely responsible for the overall 10-point increase from 53% to 63% in moral acceptance of sex between unmarried men and women since 2001, shown in Figure 2.¹⁶

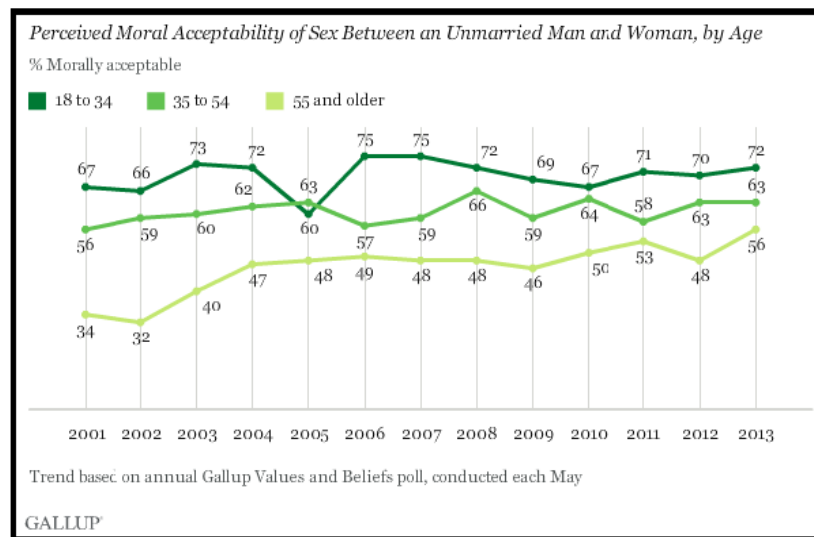


Figure 2 Moral Acceptability of Sex between Unmarried Man and Woman

Today, it is obvious that there is no longer any stigma attached to pre-marital sex; however, there is much debate amongst Christians, as to whether or not sex between two unmarried people constitutes a form of fornication. In the meantime, while many Christians are grappling with these moral and ambiguous issues; a vast majority of mainline Protestant were asked the question in a General Social Survey: “If a man and a

¹⁶ Gallup, “Older Americans’ Moral Attitudes Changing,” <http://www.gallup.com/poll/162881/older-americans-moral-attitudes-changing.aspx> (accessed March 15, 2015).

woman have sexual relations before marriage, do you think it is always wrong?"

According to the church-going Protestants, the number of those who agree with the biblical teaching on premarital sex is between 53% and 62%. For non-Church going Protestants the numbers are between 30% and 40%, shown in Figure 3.

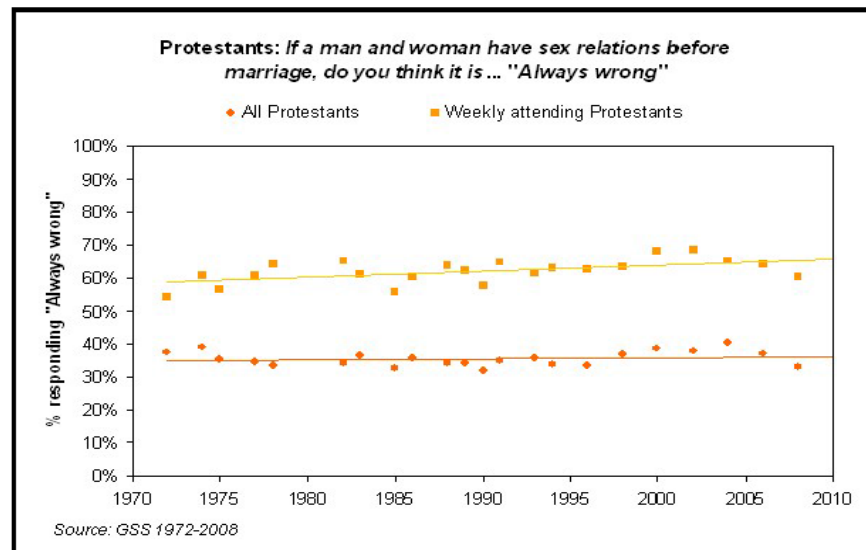


Figure 3 Protestants: "Sexual Relations before Marriage Wrong?"

So evidently it is clear that Christians do believe in premarital sex, and are obviously participating in the lifestyle. In truth, it would be reasonable to say, regardless of one's marital status and religious affiliation, living in a very secular society that promotes sex, and how to find love, can present many challenges in our lives. Therefore, based on that viewpoint one can only imagine the pressures and challenges that the CUSA are confronted with on a daily basis. To illustrate this view point, the Reverend Jeremiah A. Wright, Jr. shared this insert from his book titled, *Good News! Sermons of Hope for Today's Families*.

Several years ago one of his Church members approached him and said, “Reverend, I’ve got to talk to you right now! It is urgent, and I don’t want anybody to hear this.” Then the woman said to him, “Pastor tell me, is God going to send me to hell if I’m not celibate until I get married again? That’s what the Church folk in my group are saying. Talk to me Pastor, Single people has needs and hungers like married people do!”¹⁷

The reality and fact of the matter is God created sex for marriage, and from an ethical standpoint, it is impossible for a Churched and Unchurched Single Adults, to defend sex outside of marriage. Therefore, the Church cannot continue to act naively or assume that everyone in the community of faith understands what the Bible teaches us about human sexuality in the context of premarital sex. Furthermore, the Bible does not provide a user manual to navigate the mystery of sex! Nevertheless, we can all agree that sex is good because God created it to be enjoyed in its proper context. Seemingly, it would appear that, a majority of Church have created a culture of silence; when it comes to talking about sex one would think sex is a “messianic secret” in the religious arena. As a result, many Churched and Unchurched Single Adults who are engaged in a committed, loving sexual relationship, often experience shame, guilt, rejection, and does not consider themselves as full members, within the body of Christ.

At the same token, churches are quite aware that a vast number of Churched and Unchurched Single Adults are cohabitating, which suggest they are engaged in premarital sex. This is certainly not a surprise or new phenomena, for between 1960 and 2010, as indicated in Figure 4, the number of unmarried cohabitating couples in America has increased dramatically—more than seventeen-fold.¹⁸

¹⁷ Jeremiah A. Wright, Jr. and Jini Kilgore Ross, *Good News! Sermons of Hope for Today's Families* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1995), 12.

¹⁸ Prior to 1996, the U.S. Census estimated unmarried-couple households based on two unmarried adults of the opposite sex living in the same household. After 1996, respondents could identify themselves

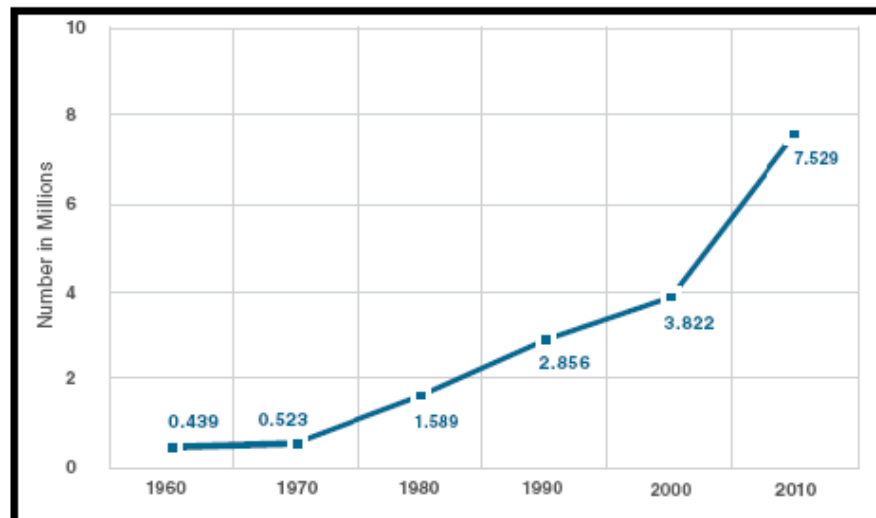


Figure 4 Number of Cohabitating Unmarried Couples

Beyond these biblical, moral and theological viewpoints, so far there is no consensus among evangelical clergy of how to address the issues appropriately from a Christian perspective. It is my belief that a majority of pastors and religious leaders are fearful and shameful in their teachings and discussions on human sexuality in the church today. This fearfulness and shamefulness can possibly be attributed to the early church fathers' negative teachings and views on sex, including the Apostle Paul, who stated that, "it is shameful even to speak of the things that they do in secret" (Ephesians 5:12). On the contrary, Paul proclaimed that, "he is not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God, which brings salvation to everyone who believes" (Romans 1:16). Yet, the church has been very slow and reluctant to bring salvation to everyone by fulfilling the Great Commission. If justice is making life right for others, then justice means working for the dignity, respect and God-given rights of all people. Therefore, I believe now is the

as unmarried partners. U.S. Census Bureau, "America's Families and Living Arrangements for 2010" (Table UC3), <http://www.census.gov/population/www/socdemo/hh-fam/cps2010.html>

time to have new dialogues and conversations about sexuality and sex among the community of faith believers. As a theological method, these interactive communications and dialogues must acknowledge human sexuality as a work in progress, coupled with creative compassion and hope, which prepares the Churched and Unchurched Single Adults to engage in their own sexual development, desire, and growth, while they move throughout the seasons of life and relationships in time and space. This is why I believe the community outreach interactive “Table Talk Forum,” is a great approach to bring awareness, education and re-engage the community of faith believers on relevant issues concerning sexuality, sex and faith. Unquestionably, I believe faith leaders, are obligated to address the moral/ethical issues of human sexuality and premarital sex among the Churched and Unchurched Single Adults. For these reasons, I believe this is a great opportunity and the beginning of my commission and call to ministry.

CHAPTER 3

PLAN OF IMPLEMENTATION

In order to attempt and achieve this task, the demonstration research will build a biblical theological and hermeneutical foundational framework, predicated upon the establish goals and strategies listed below, supported by the research question in Chapter 4.

Goal 1

To raise a conscious critical awareness, among the LPC congregation including ministerial leadership and laity on the importance of outreach ministry, with a focus on the Great Commission in the 21st Century. This awareness will initiate interactive dialogues, togetherness and solidarity that will allow the LPC congregation to support the mission of the research project, as well as to gain a broader understanding of human sexuality and sex from a biblical and theological perspective.

Strategy 1 Educate the LPC congregation, on the importance of outreach mission with a focus on the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20). The Scripture will be used as the foundational teaching model throughout the research. This will be developed over 2 sermon series, to set the stage for the outreach interactive dialogue “Table Talk Forum” community ministry. (March – April 2015)

Strategy 2 Educating/equipping church leaders/lay congregant of the issues related to human sexuality/premarital sex in our church, culture and society today. Secondly, as a church, how do we address the ethical/moral issues that primarily affect the Churched and Unchurched Single Adults in our

church/community and society? Thirdly, how do we begin to have a conversation about sex in the church today? This approach and process will help ministerial leaders/lay congregant to wrestle with their own biblical interpretations, ideologies and teachings, including the church's, in the context of human sexuality/premarital, from a generational, and historical perspectives to present. How can the church be a voice for the marginalized Churched and Unchurched Single Adults and embrace them as a valued member of the community of faith believers? (3 discussion sessions, end of March - April)

Strategy 3 Coordinate a "Community Meet & Greet" Up Close & Personal Togetherness community event, with LPC clergy and congregation to introduce the launching of the outreach interactive dialogue "Table Talk Forum" Community Ministry. (Late May or 1st week in June)

Evaluation for Goal 1

The evaluation process will consist of a questionnaire, comments/feedbacks, observations and participation. The strategic teaching models and methodologies will enable participants, church leaders/congregation to develop a conscious awareness to fulfill the Great Commission. To be more informed, educated and equipped to comfortably discuss the issues regarding human sexuality/sex in the context of the research project. To become active participants with an openness to change, to reflect on God's mission vs. church's vision/mission, in order to meet the needs God's people in space and time in the 21st Century. Ultimately, to be transformed and become an evangelism event-full purpose driven church making disciples of others, led by the Holy Spirit. Lastly, I believe healing is vital in the life of the church and is a powerful transformation to heal one's self and one's relationship with others to create a healthy environment and group bonding.

Goal 2

To identify and recruit team members and leaders to assist in the coordination process of the outreach evangelism interactive dialogue “Table Talk Forum” Community Ministry. Create a support team leadership criteria and provide team building /training, which will include members of the congregation/community who are interested.

Strategy 1 The research will develop teaching models/methodologies that will welcome testimonies, shared stories, biblical stories related to human sexuality, sexual immorality, singles, marriage, educational films/movies, pastors/religious educators, sex therapist or psychologist speakers, and an established successful Single Adult ministry leaders. (May)

Strategy 2 Create and discuss support team leadership criteria, using Norman K. Gottwald’s self-inventory Biblical Hermeneutics (see Appendix A).¹⁹ This will allow me to appropriately assign team leaders in specific areas such as interest, knowledge/experience passion and competence in support of the research. Create/review an informed consent forms for the sample focus group participants. Establish ground rules and etiquette. Investigate and provide/secure a safe space and environment to conduct the “Table Talk Forum”. (1st week in May)

Strategy 3 Identify 6-8 committed volunteer participants for the sample focus group. Meet with the participants prior to the initial kick-off meeting. The purpose is to reinitiate the research process, to answer questions/concerns related to their overall voluntary participation and what to expect. If agreed upon, proceed to get the consent forms signed. (May – 1st week in June)

Evaluation for Goal 2

Evaluations will be based on participants’ involvement in the research project, added theological and biblical knowledge, participation, new and developed skills/talents,

¹⁹Fernando F. Segovia and Mary Ann Tolbert, *Reading from this Place*, vol. 1, *Social Location and Biblical Interpretation in the United States* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 251.

interest, and how they address conflicts, commitment including feedbacks, comments, suggestions and criticism.

Goal 3

To create a safe and trusting environment base upon mutual respect and to establish ground rules and boundaries among volunteer participants.

Strategy 1 The initial kick-off gathering with the sample focus group for the community outreach interactive dialogue “Table Talk Forum” Ministry will start with an interactive introduction using the “Johari Window,” as a team building exercise, to develop an understanding, communication, respect and trust among group participants. One research question will be asked throughout the 1st 1-hour session, to observe the participants reactions. (End of June)

Strategy 2 A shadow project exercise allows participants to wrestle with aspects of their lives and selves that are normally not reflected upon in the context of the research. Most often, we tend to throw our own darkness outside of ourselves to see if it exists only in others. We sometimes react angrily when we encounter a reflection of our shadow wanting to destroy it, as it reminds us of something dark within ourselves that we’d rather have nothing to do with. The second research question will be interrelated with the shadow process in the 2nd 1-hour session, to identify/analyze correlations or contrasts. (2nd week in July)

Strategy 3 Participants will be asked to create a genealogy map of their family history. Individuals will be asked to analyze and discuss patterns, beliefs, behaviors, etc., and to identify generational patterns in their lives also. This will flow into the third/fourth question, in the 3rd 1-hour session. This will allow participants, to identify/analyze and discuss with focus group members, how they can overcome inherited embedded behaviors. (4th week in July)

Strategy 4 At the end of the focus group research, each individual will share in their own expressive way, the impact, growth, information, education, experience they

have gained through their participation throughout the research project. (1st week in August)

Evaluation for Goal 3

Each individual will be evaluated by their attendance, commitment, honesty, authenticity and participation in research project. Additionally, growth will be measured by participant's transformation, a better understanding of their human sexuality from a biblical and theological perspective, with the ability to live changed lives, and make a better healthy informed decision as it relates to sex.

In addition, from a moral absolutism viewpoint, the demonstration project will refrain from imposing the viewpoint that certain rules for living have been established (by God in Christianity), and is firmly fixed for every person's circumstance, in time and space, as it relates to human sexuality and heterosexual premarital sex. Further, I aspire not to establish the Christian ethical rights or wrongs as it relates to human sexuality and premarital sex among Churched and Unchurched Single Adults because ethics of the biblical communities are not and cannot be the same as Christian ethics, which will be expounded upon in the research demonstration.

Moreover, I am aware that the Single Adults population in our society is not a homogenous cohort, and each individual or sub-group faces a variety of moral/ethical issues and challenges, based on their social location. For this reason, the demonstration project research will establish a demographics, with a focus group of 6-8 individuals who are (a) never married (b) single parent (c) divorced/separated and (d) widowed between the ages of 18-24 or 34-49 years (depending on outcomes of participants), who are

Churched Christians, meaning they belong to a church, and the Unchurched individuals are those who do not belong to a church, have a Christian background, but are secular.²⁰

More importantly, the pedagogical aim of the demonstration research project is to bring awareness, inform, educate, and provide a biblical and theological understanding of human sexuality in the context of premarital sex. In the process the community outreach interactive “Table Talk Forum” will initiate dialogues, and serves as a conscious critical self-reflection for both LPC and the Churched and Unchurched Single Adults in the church and community for the 21st Century. Additionally, the project also serves as a voice for the marginalized Churched and Unchurched Single Adults, to motivate, empower, transform, and mobilize them to live changed lives, and share their spirituality, faith, gifts and talents among the community of faith believers for the building of God’s Kingdom.

²⁰ Lee Strobel, *Inside the Mind of Unchurched Harry and Mary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1993), 56-59.

CHAPTER 4

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Research Question 1

From a biblical perspective, how has Scripture shaped your understanding of human sexuality and premarital sex? Theologically, the fact that sin destroys our human relationships, in what way can the community of faith believers offer the redeeming word of forgiveness to single adults who are struggling with premarital sex?

Research Question 2

Why is it so difficult to openly express our feelings about sexuality? Do you believe that more dialogues concerning human sexuality in the context of premarital sex, will prevent Christian and non-Christian single adults from having sex?

Research Question 3

Does the New Testament condemnation of fornication extend to premarital sex, for engaged couple who are sincerely committed and love each other, but for certain reasons must postpone marriage for a short time?

Research Question 4

What do pastors/religious leaders need to know about the Churched and Unchurched Single Adults in their church and community? How can pastors/religious leaders develop a deeper biblical understanding of human sexuality in the lives of single

adults? How can they deconstruct their teachings that have served as judgmental in the lives of single adults?

CHAPTER 5 EVALUATION

The demonstration research project will be a qualitative research design. Therefore, an on-going evaluation process is an integral part of this demonstration research project because it provides information to measure growth and failure, in order to improve in the development and implementation of the overall research project. The methods and methodologies that will be used to assess and evaluate the overall project are: observations, questionnaires, interviews, surveys, including interviews with a sample focus group of 6-8 Churched and Unchurched Single Adult participants. The methods that will be used to evaluate LPC congregation and team members/leaders growth are: surveys, self-inventory assessment questionnaire, participation, commitment, responsibility, motivation, transformation, embracing changes, develop a biblical understanding of human sexuality/sex, gain a broader understanding of the moral/ethical issues of human sexuality/sex, with a feeling of ease/comfortableness to speak freely on the topic. Lastly, the ultimately goal is to be intentional regarding the mission of the church, in the context of the Great Commission.

The second aim/goal is to engage in biblical, theological, and hermeneutical dialogues with the focus group participants, to identify, analyze contributing factors and grapple with the moral and ethical issues of human sexuality in the context of heterosexual premarital sex among CUSA in the church and community. The sample

focus group interactive methodologies, and research questions in Chapter 4 will be evaluated through observations, participation, authenticity, group interactions (questions/answers), commitment to the duration of project and gaining a broader biblical/theological understanding of human sexuality and premarital sex—with the ability to make more informed decisions in their lives. The pedagogical aim is to motivate, inspire, and educate to enable growth development and transformation, as well as, to give hope, affirmation, and support, allowing the Holy Spirit to guide their hearts always.

Lastly, it is my hope that the focus group participants will be able to freely express their own human sexuality in the context of premarital sex, without feeling shamed, condemned, and devalued in the church and community. This will be evaluated, through their personal presentation at the end of the research project, and how they plan to apply the information in their personal lives, will be the most rewarding for me in the research project. The pedagogical aim is to give hope, affirm, and support allowing the Holy Spirit to guide their hearts.

CHAPTER 6

MINISTERIAL COMPETENCIES

During the duration of my seminary internship since 2011 - present and ministerial involvement at the Linden Presbyterian Church (LPC) Linden, NJ, I have been under the leadership guidance and supervision of my pastor, Reverend Dr. William C. Weaver, and a teaching committee, which was assigned for evaluating my overall ministerial growth at LPC. In the evaluation process, Dr. Weaver and the teaching committee had the opportunity to evaluate my tasks and church assignments based on the New York Theological Seminary Ministerial Competences form. During the informal discussions the areas that I did not have an assigned responsibility to demonstrate my leadership skills, which I believe will be instrumental in developing the community outreach interactive “Table Talk Forum” Ministry are:

Administrator – The ability to define and analyze a task or problem effectively and clearly, establish concrete and realistic goals, develop strategies which flow out of these goals and initiate a clear process of evaluation. Also, being able to communicate a sense of mission which sees each task as part of the whole life of the congregation and establishes a collegial environment in which the gifts of others are expressed.

Financial Management – Being able to demonstrate my understanding of financial matters as it relates to the successful implementation and sustenance of the community outreach interactive “Table Talk Forum” ministry.

Technology/Social Media Management – This is key component in the implementation of the “Table Talk Forum,” such as design a webpage, media networking, video/film and editing, produce a mobile app., podcast sermons, tweet, and craft daily blogs.

Time Management – The ability to manage my time effectively and learning to delegating responsibilities.

Pastoral Care – Most importantly learning to take care of self.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: TIMELINE

Date	Task/Activity	Tools Necessary	Person Responsible
*Twice a month.	Ingrid Singh Self Care Regimen.	Self!	Ingrid Singh
March 5, 2015	Site Team Review/Sign Off on DMin. Proposal.	Compose Project Proposal Letter for Dr. Russell.	Site Team
March 9, 2015	Approval of DMin. Proposal	Electronic Copy. Bind Copies (2)	Dr. Russell/Dr. Lundy
March 12, 2015	Meet with Advisor (Bi-Weekly) upon completion of project.	Proposal & New Additional Info. For DMin. Dissertations	Dr. Weaver (TBD)
March 22, 2015	Preach 1st Sermon series on the "The Great Commission" at LPC.	Distribute brief survey to evaluate the outcome and growth of project/congregation.	Ingrid Singh (Preaching) Site-Team will assist in assessment.
March 29, 2015	Educating/equipping church/lay leaders and congregation on moral/ethical issues relative to human sexuality/premarital sex, affecting church & unchurched Christians in the church/local community.	Brief PowerPoint presentation. Q & A, followed by a self-inventory questionnaire.	Ingrid Singh & Site -Team
April 5, 2015	Establish a core team in support of the implementation of the "Table Talk Forum"	Develop a leadership criteria, provide training, and leisure time for group bonding.	Ingrid Singh & Site-Team

Date	Task/Activity	Tools Necessary	Person Responsible
April 19, 2015	Preach 2st Sermon series on the “The Great Commission” at I.P.C. Followed by the Introduction/Launching of the Community Outreach Interactive “Table Talk Forum” Ministry, including a brief verbal presentation of the purpose, mission and relevance of the ministry.	Advertise in local paper, church web page, face book and other social media resources. Create contact information/demographic sheet. Design flyers/brochure. Create a survey.	Ingrid Singh, “Table Talk Forum” leadership team & Site-team.
April 20-24, 2015	Follow-up with attendees, that might be interested to voluntary participate as a focus group for the research project.	Compose letter to send to local church, informing and requesting their voluntary participation. Compose informed consent letter. Establish ground rules and etiquette.	Ingrid Singh, “Table Talk Forum” leadership team & Site-team.
April 25-30	Investigate /reserve safe space/environment to conduct focus group research activities.		Ingrid Singh, “Table Talk Forum” leadership team & Site-team.
May 1-8, 2015	Identify voluntary focus group participants.	Make sure focus group understands the details of their voluntary participation and sign the informed consent letter.	Ingrid Singh, “Table Talk Forum” leadership team & Site-team.

Date	Task/Activity	Tools Necessary	Person Responsible
2nd week in May – July 2015	1st initially kick-off session. Introduction of leader and group participants.	The “Johari Window” team building and communication process, which will lead into our 1st research question. (Evaluate by observations, participations, feedbacks, and criticism)	Ingrid Singh
2nd week in May – July 2015	2nd Session-“Shadow Project”	Construction paper, old magazines/newspaper, pictures, glue, scissors’. Discussion will lead into 2nd research question.	Ingrid Singh
2nd week in May – July 2015	3rd Session-“Genealogy Family History”	Focus group will be asked to create a genealogy family history, prior to the activity. Discussion will lead into 3rd research question.	Ingrid Singh
2nd week in May – July 2015	4th Session-“Personal Growth Presentation”	Group participants will have an opportunity to present their presentation in which ever manner or style to choose.	Ingrid Singh
2nd week in May – July 2015	5th Session-“Thank You” gathering	TBD among group leader, and focus group participants.	Ingrid Singh, “Table Talk Forum” leadership team & Site-team.
August - 2015	Compile and interpret research findings. Continue the dissertation write up of the project.		Ingrid Singh, Advisor and Site-Team

Date	Task/Activity	Tools Necessary	Person Responsible
August – Sept. 2015	Meet with a Sex Therapist/Physiologist to obtain additional information. Meet with local religious leaders/community leaders to gain a wider spectrum of the community and issues related to the project. Attend workshops/seminars.		Ingrid Singh, “Table Talk Forum” leadership team & Site-team.
Nov. – Dec. 2015	Work on dissertation.	Complete and review 1st draft.	Ingrid Singh, Advisor, Site Team & Editor
January - 2016	Prepare a PPT/Video for final Presentation.	Create & design 1st presentation draft.	Ingrid Singh & Social media Team (TBD)
January - 2016	Make changes to dissertation.	Review 2nd draft	Ingrid Singh, Advisor, Site Team & Editor
1st Week in February 2016	Review dissertation presentation draft.	Complete dissertation presentation draft	Ingrid Singh, Advisor & Social media Team (TBD)
March – April 2016	Review final dissertation draft.	Complete final dissertation draft	Ingrid Singh, Advisor & Editor
2nd week in April 2016	Send electronic copy of dissertation for final sign off.		Dr. Russell & Dr. Lundy
Last week in April 2016	Print and bind final dissertation document	Staples.	Ingrid Singh

APPENDIX B: BUDGET

Date	Task/Activity	Tools/Necessary to complete task	Person Responsible	Source of Funding	Description	Amount of Expense
3/22/15	Ingrid Singh 1st Preaching Series I.	Survey for LPC Congregation.	Ingrid Singh & Site-Team Members.		Printing & design materials.	\$20.00
Twice a Month	Ingrid's Self Care.		Ingrid Singh	Ingrid & Family	Relaxation, laughter, rest, and time spent with close friends.	\$200.00 monthly
3/29/15	Educating/equipping church/lay leaders and congregation.	Computer, projector/screen	Ingrid Singh & Site-Team Members.	Donations from LPC congregation.	Juice, bagels & pastry.	
4/17/15	New "Table Talk Forum" Core Team Group Bonding.	Bring one's authentic self.	Ingrid Singh & "Table Talk Forum" Core Team Members.	Ingrid (Personal)	Venue/activity to be discussed among the group members.	\$200.00
4/19/15	Ingrid Singh 2nd Preaching Series II introduction, launching "Table Talk Forum".	Flyers/brochures, contact sheets and surveys handouts.	Ingrid Singh, "Table Talk Forum" Core Team Members & Site-Team.	LPC & Ingrid	Advertising materials & refreshments.	\$300.00
May - July	Focus Group Activities		Ingrid Singh, "Table Talk	Ingrid	Projects materials & snacks.	\$250.00

Date	Task/Activity	Tools/Necessary to complete task	Person Responsible	Source of Funding	Description	Amount of Expense
July – August 2015	Social Media training.	Computer, video camera	Ingrid Singh	Ingrid (Personal)	Training & equipment.	\$1000.00
Nov-Dec 2015	Review draft dissertation.		Ingrid Singh, Advisor & Site-Team.	Ingrid (Personal)	Staples for printing & Editing fees.	\$1200.00
February 2016	Demonstration Project Presentation	Computer, projector.	Ingrid Singh, Advisor, Site-Team & “Table Talk Forum” Team Members.	Ingrid Singh	Designing presentation and lunch for guests.	\$700.00
April 2016	Printing/binding final copy of dissertation.	Computer	Ingrid Singh & Advisor	Ingrid Singh	Printing & Binding of dissertation.	\$400.00
May 2016	GRADUATION	Restful Self	Ingrid Singh	Ingrid & Family	Celebration	\$600.00

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APPENDIX B
Sex Table Talk Forum

The Linden Presbyterian Church
1506 Orchard Terrace, Linden NJ, 07036

Coming Soon in May-June, 2015

“Sex Table Talk Forum”



Living in a sex saturated culture and society today, can be very challenging for the Churched and Unchurched Singles Adults, when sex is one of the most misunderstood and misinterpreted topics in the 21st century. For this reason, as a member of the Linden Presbyterian Church, who is completing my doctoral research study, in the area of Human Sexuality in the context of premarital sex, I am looking for volunteers to be a part of a research **Focus Group**, to engage in an interactive community outreach **“Table Talk Forum”**, dialogues with Singles Adults who are **(never married, divorced, separated, widowed)**, who are seeking biblical/theological understanding, guidance and affirmation, regarding their God given human sexuality, that will empower, liberate and inform healthy choices in sexual behaviors.

Highlights of Activities

- ♦ Johari Window
- ♦ Research Questions
- ♦ Shadow Project
- ♦ Genealogy Family Map

For more information, please contact:
Ingrid Singh (973) 289-7665
itsingh@aol.com

APPENDIX C
Research Consent Form

Ingrid Singh (Doctoral Candidate)

New York Theological Seminary

Cell (973) 289-7665

Email: itsingh@aol.com

RESEARCH CONSENT FORM

Purpose: As a Prophetic Singles Adult Ministry leader, and a member of the Linden Presbyterian Church, Linden NJ, this demonstration project will develop a community outreach interactive "Table Talk Forum" for the Churched and Unchurched Singles Young Adults who seeks biblical/theological understanding, guidance and affirmation, regarding their God given human sexuality; that will inform healthy choices in sexual behaviors.

Procedures: As a volunteer participant between the age (19-25), if you agree/consent you will participate in a voluntary sample focus group interactive discussion/interview community outreach "Table Talk" forum, which will consist of 3-4 sessions, and be conducted at the Linden Presbyterian Church, or an offsite location upon participants mutual agreement. Also, please be advised that the discussion/interview will be audio recorded and video for the research project material editing and final oral demonstration presentation purposes only.

Time Required: The focus group discussion will take approximately 1 hr: 30mins (per session) of your time and for those who are interested in personal interviews will take approximately 30mins.

Risks: There are no known risks associated with the discussions/interviews. However, everyone will be informed before the process that the discussions/interviews might and can be sensitive to you and others, therefore, pastoral care will be provided along with other resources accordingly.

Confidentiality/Anonymity: As a voluntary participant, your name will be kept confidential in all the writing materials of the research study project. In addition, the research project will use fictitious names relative to the discussions/interviews to conceal your identity, unless you specify that you desire to be identified by name. Further, whatever we share and discuss as a group, will also be kept confidential. I will be the only person present for the focus group discussions and personal interviews, and will use an audio recorder/video, to interpret appropriately in preparation of the final research project.

If you desire to use your real name for the discussion/interview research study project, please indicate the name you would like me to use here:_____.

Voluntary Participation: Your participation in the research study "Focus Group" discussions/interviews is completely voluntary, and you can refuse to answer any question, or decide not to participate in the discussion if you desire to do so at any time.

Ground Rules: The importance of the ground rules is to articulate a set of expected behaviors during the focus group discussions. Ground rules also define the processes in which the group will make decisions, communicate with each other while working together.

Benefits of the Research Project: The benefits of this research project: (a) Will inform, educate and enable the Church and Unchurched Singles Young Adults to engage in dialogues, relative to the challenges, concerns and reality, as it relates to human sexuality in the context of premarital sex. (b) validating the realities, challenges/barriers that (CUSYA) faces in society/church. (c) witnessing and sharing personal experiences with others, (d) give hope, affirm, motivate, liberate and empower (CUSYA) to make healthy choices, in sexual behaviors (e) recognize/believe that the (CUSYA) have a purpose and a place within the body of faith believers (f) share the Good News of our Savior Jesus Christ who came to save humanity from our sin from your social location.

Sharing the Results: The results of the research project will be available to participants your request. Additionally, the results will be use as a platform/guideline to help church leaders including myself in developing relevant biblical teaching models that will foster interactive dialogues, as well as address/wrestle with the challenges/ambiguities and concerns as it relates to human sexuality in the context of premarital sex in the 21st century.

Publication: I am very committed and passionate about this research project, and believe there is a possibility that I will publish a book in the near future. Please be assured, I will inform contributors and participants upon my decisions, to protect your anonymity.

Before Signing: If you have read and agree to voluntary participate in the "Focus Group" discussion, or "Personal Interview", please initial the box along with your signature and date. A copy will be given to you.
Thank you for your time, cooperation and participation.

I will participate in the focus group discussion: Yes

I will participate in a personal interview: Yes _____

Participant's Signature: _____

Date: _____

Print Name: _____ Date: _____

Researcher's Signature: _____

Date: _____

Print Name: _____

Date: _____

APPENDIX D
Focus Group Participants Evaluation Form

Evaluation

Researcher _____

Discussion Topic _____

Please evaluate the following statements using 1 through 5 scales:

1: Strongly Disagree 2: Disagree 3: Neutral 4: Agree 5: Strongly Agree

The Presenter

_____ Was biblically knowledgeable about the sermon message

_____ Was well prepared

_____ Was engaging and interesting

_____ Encouraged participation & interactions

The Sermon

___ Increased my understanding of Domestic Violence

___ Brought awareness and allowed LPC members to engage in dialogues

___ Provided biblical examples of domestic violence

___ Helped me to reflect and grow spiritually

___ Was encouraging, transformative, and healing

Please indicate your overall rating for the religious service:

☐ Poor ☐ Satisfactory ☐ Neutral ☐ Good ☐ Excellent

Additional Comments:

APPENDIX E
The Great Commission Evaluation

Evaluation

Presenter(s): *Ingrid Singh*

Sermon Topic(s): *"The Great Commission "Part I & Part II."*

Please evaluate the following statements using 1 through 5 scales:

1: Strongly Disagree 2: Disagree 3: Neutral 4: Agree 5: Strongly Agree

The Presenter

_____ Was biblically knowledgeable about the sermon message

_____ Was well prepared

_____ Was engaging and interesting

_____ Encouraged participation & interactions

The Sermon

___ Increased my understanding of Domestic Violence

___ Brought awareness and allowed LPC members to engage in dialogues

___ Provided biblical examples of domestic violence

___ Helped me to reflect and grow spiritually

___ Was encouraging, transformative, and healing

Please indicate your overall rating for the religious service:

☐ Poor ☐ Satisfactory ☐ Neutral ☐ Good ☐ Excellent

Additional Comments:

Thank You

APPENDIX F
Domestic Violence Awareness Service Evaluation

Evaluation

Presenter(s): *Ingrid Singh*

Sermon Topic(s): *“Throwing Stone Domestic Violence Service”*

Please evaluate the following statements using 1 through 5 scales:

1: Strongly Disagree 2: Disagree 3: Neutral 4: Agree 5: Strongly Agree

The Presenter

_____ Was biblically knowledgeable about the sermon message

_____ Was well prepared

_____ Was engaging and interesting

_____ Encouraged participation & interactions

The Sermon & Fellowship time DV Discussion Panel

___ Increased my understanding of Domestic Violence

___ Brought awareness and allowed LPC members to engage in dialogues

___ Provided biblical examples of domestic violence

___ Helped me to reflect and grow spiritually

___ Was encouraging, transformative, and healing

Please indicate your overall rating for the *“Domestic Violence Awareness”* service and fellowship time discussion panel:

☐ Poor ☐ Satisfactory ☐ Neutral ☐ Good ☐ Excellent

Additional Comments:

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